DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 250 421 UD 023 879

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TITLE Citizen Guide to Children out of School: The Issues, Data, Explanations and Solutions to Absenteeism, Dropouts, and Disciplinary Exclusion.
INSTITUTION Citizens' Council for Ohio Schools, Cleveland.
SPONS AGENCY Carnegie Corp. of New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE Sep 84
NOTE 51p.
AVAILABLE FROM Citizens' Council for Ohio Schools, 453 The Arcade, Cleveland, Ohio 44114 ($5.00 per copy).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attendance; *Board of Education Policy; Discipline Policy; Dropout Prevention; Dropout Rate; *Dropouts; Elementary Secondary Education; *Expulsion; *Out of School Youth; School Attendance Legislation; School Policy; State Standards; *Suspension; Truancy
IDENTIFIERS *Ohio

ABSTRACT

This guide to children out of school is addressed mainly, but not exclusively, to school districts, school personnel, and concerned citizens in the State of Ohio. The greatest focus is on the educator's role in assuring that all children are served and on finding solutions when school participation problems exist. The basic position on attendance of the Citizens Council for Ohio Schools is outlined, with an emphasis on student well-being and the importance of using data for identifying problems and developing policy. Three chapters follow, each of which discusses a different attendance problem and outlines the Council's position on the issue, as well as providing a bibliography of relevant literature. The first chapter describes Ohio's attendance legislation and considers ways of determining when absenteeism is a problem. School attendance data for Ohio are given, as are some explanations for why children stay away and some suggestions for intervention. Chapter II provides an overview of the controversy about school exclusion (relating it to the school desegregation movement) and discusses the wisdom of suspension and expulsion as disciplinary measures. Some alternatives to suspension are discussed, and legal issues and data on exclusionary practices in Ohio are considered. The subject of Chapter III is dropouts. Relevant legal issues are detailed, a history of dropping out as a major problem is presented, and Ohio dropout data are presented. Finally, some solutions to the droupout problem are considered. (KH)

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A Report of the Citizens' Council for Ohio Schools

UD 023879

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Citizens' Council for Ohio Schools

Prepared by

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September, 1984

Funding for the research, writing and publication of this report was provided by the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

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Forward

What happens each day in classrooms, in elementary and secondary schools in school districts across the country makes a difference in individual lives and is important for society. For schooling to be positive, this very human enterprise must be of high quality: purposeful, responsive to human needs, humane and effective.

The preservation and continued effectiveness of the public schools require constant attention. It is this belief that led to the creation in 1974 of the Citizens' Council for Ohio Schools. Council founders felt that a citizen voice, independent of the education interest groups, able to research and evaluate information about critical issues and to share that information, and committed to what happens to children in the education process, would contribute to the quality of this public institution. The work of the Council has focused on several issues including the painful problem of children out of school.

Children out of school refers to the often intertwined problems of student absenteeism and dropping out, and school practices such as suspension and expulsion that exclude students and often contribute to their participation problems. In 1977 the Council started its work on this topic and released the publication, *Children Out of School in Ohio.* The publication outlined the quantitative data on school participation in Ohio school districts and called attention to the fact that too many children in Ohio are not participating fully in the education system that is so essential for their growth and development.

Recent data indicate that children are still not participating at the levels that indicate that all children are being served well in public school. Some problems are:

1. Many valuable school days are lost each year in Ohio due to unexcused absences. Data for the last 12 years indicate that about 93% of the students in Ohio attend daily. In 1982-83 the rate was 93.4% and 22 million school days were missed. Assuming that a 95% attendance rate is the level that reflects legitimate absences, 5.5 million days were lost because of unexcused absences.

2. Most school districts in Ohio have attendance rates that are better than the state average and about half have rates of nearly 95% or better. That leaves a small but significant proportion of districts with serious attendance problems (about 10%). In the district with the worst attendance in 1982-83, total attendance was 85% and the rate for secondary students was 75%. Secondary attendance was low in a number of districts.

3. School districts reported a total of 23,473 dropouts from grades 7-12 during the 1982-83 school year or 2.6% of the enrollment in those grades. The state dropout rate deteriorated yearly in the late 1970's to 3.7% but appears to be improving. Improvement is not guaranteed.

4. Not all Ohio school districts had dropout rates as low as the state average. There were 30 districts with rates between 12.2% and 4.0%. Grade level data indicate that as many as 29% of the students enrolled in tenth grade dropped out of school in one year from one school district. Several districts had grade level rates in excess of 10%.

5. School districts in Ohio suspended 6.1% of their students at least once, a larger share than the 5.3% national average for the 1979-80 school year. Not only was a larger share of students suspended, but there were differences in rates by race that also differed from the national figures. In Ohio about 5% of white students, 6% of Hispanic students, and 13% of black students were suspended at least once, compared to the national average data of 5%, 5%, and 10% respectively.

6. Suspension rates in individual districts were as high as 21%, and 25 districts out of 253 surveyed in 1979-80 suspended more than 9.5% of their students. A rate of less than 4% is common in more than half the districts in Ohio.

7. In 17 of the 57 districts surveyed that had substantial minority enrollment, the suspension rate for total enrollment was greater than the state average, and minority students were excluded at rates far in excess of their white peers.

8. The use of suspension in some buildings is so frequent that 80% of the children can be affected.

Student participation in Ohio schools is not at the level it should be in all schools and school districts in the state. Data for the state as a whole and for districts in the state indicate that

many problems persist. Attention must be given to solving these problems. It will take efforts by citizens and educators working in school buildings to assure maximum school participation for all children in Ohio.

Our focus is on public schools and their effectiveness with children. The emphasis in this work is on how the formal school structure does its job of educating children. We are concerned about those things that are within the scope of educator responsibility and competency. This does not mean that the other participants in the process lack responsibility or that other factors do not make the challenge difficult. The emphasis in this document, however, is on the school's role and how to make it as positive and effective as possible.

A number of beliefs and assumptions underlie the work of the Council and motivate its concern for the fact that many youth in Ohio are not enrolled in school at all, attend sporadically, or are denied participation as a form of punishment. Those beliefs and assumptions are:

1. The well-being and growth of children must be central and primary when running schools, making decisions related to education, and evaluating how well the system and its employees are doing their jobs.

2. One reason that public education is special, highly valued, and worthy of support is that it is not an exclusive institution; it exists for all children. One measure of how well children's interests are being served is the ability and commitment of school personnel to include and serve all children.

3. While the schools cannot by themselves assure that all children participate, they must try to find solutions, and must minimize any way in which they contribute to children not participating. Well-designed, managed, and staffed educational programs lead to the education of all children.

4. The need for schools to serve all children is increased by the widespread commitment to schooling as the major source of education, and the great significance that has been given to high school graduation as key to assuming adult roles.

5. While schools cannot reorder society or solve all economic or social problems, they can be expected to work with all children. Failure to do so contributes to inequality.

6. When schools fail to do their jobs they must change. When a large portion of students are absent, excluded or dropout, something has broken down in the interlocking structure that makes schools work. Solutions are found in a combination of building level practices, district policy, resources, leadership, skilled personnel, and community outreach.

7. Because public schools are such a valuable institution, their survival is important. Survival depends on solving problems.

8. The problems of children out of school can be solved. Solutions depend on monitoring conditions to detect problems, clear analysis of what is taking place, and the design and implementation of appropriate interventions. Citizens and parents have an important role to play in each step.

Through the years we have learned a great deal about these problems, about policy and practices that are helpful and harmful, about how to address these problems, and about citizen and school efforts that can help. This report is an effort to share some of our knowledge and our views about these problems and what can be done to assure that children are well served in Ohio's public schools. We hope it will be helpful to others who are concerned about these issues and will contribute to problem-solving efforts.

Frank Lomax, III
Chairman

Citizen Guide to Children Out of School

Summary

Ohio has formalized its commitment to public education for all children by providing by law a free public elementary and secondary education to Ohio residents from age five through 21, and generally requiring all residents to participate until high school graduation or the age of 18, whichever comes first.

The Citizens' Council for Ohio Schools shares this commitment to the value of schooling and believes that the public schools are special and worthy of the substantial public investments that are regularly made to support them, because they are for all children. If all children are not served, it is indicative of problems which must be addressed.

Students must be in school to be served. On any school day in any school district there are some children who are not in school. Illness and legitimate excuses cannot be avoided. On the other hand, children are often out of school for explanations which the Council finds to be troubling:

- Some children who are enrolled in school stay away in violation of the law. This is especially troubling when it is chronic or when many children in a given building or district are absent.
- Some children are out of school because they have been excluded by the school as a punishment. Children may be within the school building but excluded from classes for up to ten days on an "in-school suspension." Children may also be out of the building for up to ten days because they have been suspended, or as long as a semester because they have been expelled. These punishments are troubling when used for behavior that is not threatening or illegal, when the incidence is high, or when some groups are affected more frequently than others.
- Some children who are eligible for schooling are no longer enrolled. They have dropped out without graduating. This is a problem when any young person, regardless of their age or reason for leaving, quits school. It is also troubling when many children in a building or district drop out.

Student absenteeism, disciplinary exclusion, and dropouts are the subjects of this guide to children out of school. Each issue is addressed as a separate chapter since most research and action focuses on one of these problems at a time. This document reviews, for each issue, existing statistics on these problems in Ohio, some of the history of efforts to address these problems, and the literature on the explanations for these problems and solutions. Each chapter also includes a summary of the Council's view of the most important information related to each issue.

The reader will find considerable overlap in the way the issues are discussed, the explanations and the solutions. This overlap reflects the fact that while these issues have typically been identified as separate issues, they have much in common. These issues are often symptoms of the same problems, certain children are vulnerable to all of these problems, one is interrelated with the other and can be predictive of the other or may contribute to the other, and remedies designed to solve one when focused on root causes will undoubtedly result in solutions to the others.

The emphasis of this report is on school-based solutions to these problems. The Council understands that a wide range of problems may contribute to the existence of these problems, and

that effective schools that serve all children are a shared responsibility. Our focus, however, is on the educator's vital role in assuring that all children are served and finding solutions when school participation problems exist. The Council believes this focus is important because school personnel must respond when these problems exist. Furthermore, these problems can be symptoms of school-based problems which school personnel must solve.

After eight years of monitoring these problems in Ohio, talking with school personnel and citizens about their causes and what can be done, and studying the literature, the Council has developed a few basic positions that we feel are critical to assessing the existence of these problems and finding solutions. They are summarized here as our basic positions on children out of school, and reappear throughout this document.

1. Any time a child is out of school, that child's education is interrupted and it is a problem. It is a problem which school personnel must address.

2. When a large number of children in a given school building or district are not in school because of absenteeism, disciplinary exclusion practices, or because they dropped out, it may be indicative of school quality problems rather than problem children. The most fruitful approach to improving participation in those instances is likely to result from an examination of school practices and changes that make the school more responsive to children, rather than finding ways to change the children who are not participating.

3. When assessing if there are student participation problems, statistics on attendance rates, dropout rates, and suspension and expulsion rates are important. Because students attend school in school buildings and school districts, building and district level data are the most appropriate to determine if the incidence is excessive.

4. Comparative statistics on these issues are essential for evaluating these data for any location. If the focus is the state, then a review of the distribution of rates for all districts in the state is the way to assess what is occurring in the state, and to identify any location that differs from what is common in other districts in the state. If the focus is an individual school district, then comparisons to other districts provides perspective on the meaning of the data for that district. Furthermore, a review of building level data within that district is important to identifying individual schools which may be the location of problems. The state average is not an appropriate statistic for assessing these issues at the state or district level. The median and the distribution of rates among districts are more appropriate.

5. Because data are key to monitoring participation problems, and because participation problems can be indicators of school quality problems, the state education agency should regularly collect, analyze and make public these data for all districts in the state, focusing on district level data. Ohio is fortunate because data are now collected from each district in the state on attendance and dropouts. Unfortunately, centrally collected data are not regularly available on suspension and expulsion. Furthermore, a regular analysis of these data is not made and distributed to school personnel and the public, nor does the data trigger state attention.

6. School district personnel should collect, analyze and make public the data and its meaning for their districts. This is important as a way to monitor these problems and to identify specific buildings within individual districts where problems may exist.

7. Citizens who are interested in assuring that schools serve all children and are of a high quality should also monitor the data on these problems, and express concern when the data suggest that problems may exist.

CHAPTER I

Absenteeism

Student participation in schools is an old concern. As early as 1885, states had laws requiring students to be enrolled in school and to attend. Today, all states have some participation requirements. They call for students to attend school while they are of compulsory school age, which varies from state to state. These laws also usually establish school district authority to enforce the laws.

Compulsory attendance laws, and the commitment and ability to enforce them, have changed through the years (Tyack, 1976 and 1974). The push for their adoption came from many interests and beliefs about the value and the role of schooling as a source of personal growth, upward mobility, social and individual reform, and social stability (Richardson, 1980; Tyack, 1974 and 1976). Regardless of their source, these laws confirm widely held views that schooling is important and desirable for all children.

The Requirements to Participate in Ohio

Ohio law establishes the importance of elementary and secondary schooling for all youth. It is one of the strictest requirements of any state. The law both guarantees access to schooling and requires participation. All Ohio youth must be enrolled in an accredited elementary or secondary school program and must attend regularly from the age of six until 18 years, unless they graduate from high school before reaching that age. All residents of Ohio school districts are guaranteed access to the local public schools from the age of five until 22. The law outlines a few exceptions to the enrollment requirement, and instances when absence is acceptable.

Students, parents, and school personnel are all responsible for assuring that students attend school regularly. Ideally, maximum participation can occur when students make the effort to get to school and participate; parents provide the support and encouragement that assures that their children attend; and school personnel provide a positive academic experience, and a safe and supportive environment for learning.

There are legal requirements and sanctions that reinforce this shared responsibility. They give schools the additional responsibility of enforcing compliance with the law. The law authorizes districts to employ attendance workers and gives them authority to investigate absences, and, following appropriate due process procedure, to use the courts to prosecute children or their parents for illegal absenteeism.

When is Absenteeism a Problem?

Children should be in school. Despite this widely shared belief and legally mandated requirement, it is unusual for all children and all schools to have perfect attendance. Illness and other legitimate barriers prevent perfect participation. Furthermore, some students are absent for reasons that are not permitted. Because school attendance is so important for education and because of the legal requirements, every absence for any reason is a problem. Absence for legitimate reasons usually does not generate any special concern or activity. Absence for unacceptable reasons, however, is another issue. It requires special effort by school personnel as mandated by law, and causes concern among educators, parents, and the community.

Absenteeism for unacceptable reasons is usually called truancy. Truancy is an old and persistent problem with consequences for the child who is absent, the school, and society. The child misses the educational experience offered in the school, and may fail to acquire useful skills and credentials needed for adult roles. The school must expend precious staff time working on the problem, and the educational process is disrupted. When many students fail to attend, it jeopardizes the school's legitimacy and stature with the community (Whitehead and Marshall, 1980; Brimm et al., 1979; Birman and Natriello, 1978). Many people associate truancy with delinquent behavior, and many communities are upset by the presence of unsupervised youth who are seen as the source of vandalism and neighborhood insecurity (*Empty Desks*, N.D.). Society also suffers from the long-term effect of absenteeism which can cause the child to fail academically. The person is likely to create problems as an adult in that community because of the lack of competencies required to assume a productive role.

The most common focus for identifying the existence of an attendance problem is to look at individual attendance patterns. Schools typically monitor individual behavior daily in order to identify children who are absent, to investigate those absences, and to encourage attendance when absence is found to be due to unacceptable reasons. This is part of their legal responsibility.

It is also common to monitor levels of attendance or rates of attendance for a classroom, a building, or a school district. This approach suggests that absenteeism is not simply an individual's problem (*Ohio Public School Attendance Rate Analysis*, 1983; Kaeser and Landrum, 198[illegible]). If the rates of absence are out of line with what is expected for legitimate reasons, then absenteeism is a problem which deserves closer attention. Except in cases where unusual rates of absenteeism can be explained by unusual external factors such as an epidemic, a strike, or inclement weather, a high rate of absenteeism means that the educational institution is having trouble fulfilling its responsibility to serve all children. This problem deserves special attention and often receives it.

The exact level of absenteeism for a classroom, school, or district which is indicative of a need for concern is not well defined. One rule of thumb is that absence of about 5 percent is what is to be expected under normal conditions and for legitimate excuses (*Student Absenteeism*, 1977). If the level of absence deviates significantly from that rate, it is

thought to indicate truancy and a problem.

Another approach is to compare the specific unit to what is typical of other comparable units. For example, attendance rates for each classroom within a building can be compared to identify deviant rates. Similarly, all junior high schools within a district or within a county could be compared. The attendance rates for whole school districts can also be compared to locate districts where absenteeism is a special problem in need of intervention.

An unusual rate of absenteeism does not automatically mean that there is widespread truancy. Data are a helpful way to signal potential problems. It is always important to investigate further before drawing any conclusions from rates alone.

Student Attendance Data for Ohio

Each year the Ohio Department of Education collects information from each of the districts in the state about the number and proportion of students in attendance on average for the school year. A rate of attendance is calculated which represents the number of students in attendance on average for the whole school year as a proportion of those who were enrolled on average throughout the school year.

These statistics are prepared at the end of each school year by each school district for the total enrollment, and for the subcategories of kindergarten, elementary, junior high, joint vocational secondary, and other secondary (high school). The data reviewed here are for the 1982–83 school year. During that year there were 614 school districts in Ohio. Every district enrolled students in kindergarten and elementary school, and all but one had high school students. There were 353 districts with junior high schools. The data for joint vocational schools are not reviewed here.

These data can be used to describe what is happening to all students in Ohio as a group, and individual districts. The distribution of individual district data for all districts also makes it possible to develop a comparative view of what is happening in individual districts. This makes it possible to better assess the meaning of the data for an individual district, or to identify locations that excel or have clear problems in light of what is typical in a large number of districts.

The Aggregated Data for Ohio

The aggregated data for the state during the 1982–83 school year are on Table 1 and indicate that many valuable days of instruction were lost in Ohio. The average rate of attendance for all students in all grades and all districts was 93.3%. On average, 122,937 students were absent

TABLE 1

Attendance Data for All Ohio School Districts
1982–83 School Year

Grade Level	Rate of Attendance	Average # Students Absent Each Day
Kindergarten	93.4%	8,921
Elementary	94.9%	47,116
Junior High	92.3%	19,534
Joint Vocational	92.7%	2,951
Other Secondary	91.5%	44,415
Total Enrollment	93.3%	122,937

Source: *ADM and ADA Reports 1982–83 School Year*, Ohio Department of Education, Division of Computer Services and Statistical Reports.

TABLE 2

Average Attendance Rates in Percent for Ohio Schools
1971–72 Through 1982–83

Year	Kind.	Elem.	Jr. High	JVS[1]	Other Sec.	Total
1971–72	91.7	94.6	92.7		91.7	93.4
1972–73	91.6	94.5	92.2		91.2	93.1
1973–74	91.4	93.9	91.4		90.5	92.4
1974–75	92.2	94.6	92.0		90.9	93.0
1975–76	92.4	94.6	92.2		91.0	93.0
1976–77	92.0	94.3	91.6	91.6	90.6	92.7
1977–78	91.7	93.9	91.5	91.1	90.0	92.3
1978–79	92.1	94.2	91.1	91.3	90.1	92.4
1979–80	92.4	94.3	91.1	91.7	90.5	92.6
1980–81	92.6	94.5	91.4	92.2	90.6	92.8
1981–82	93.2	94.9	89.6	92.6	91.0	93.0
1982–83	93.4	94.7	92.3	92.7	91.5	93.3

[1]JVS stands for Joint Vocational Schools.

Source: *Ohio Public School 1981–82 Attendance Rate Analysis*, Ohio Department of Education, January 1983; and *Average Attendance in Percent, 1982–83 School Year Report*, Ohio Department of Education, Division of Computer Services and Statistical Reports.

TABLE 3

Distribution of Attendance Rates by Grade Category for Ohio School Districts: 1982-83 School Year[1]

Attendance Rate Interval	Total Enrollment # of Districts	Total Enrollment % of Districts	Secondary # of Districts	Secondary % of Districts	Jr. High # of Districts	Jr. High % of Districts	Elementary # of Districts	Elementary % of Districts
97.0% +	5	.8%	3	.5%	7	2.0%	16	2.6%
96.0-96.9%	36	5.9%	21	3.4%	30	8.5%	93	15.1%
95.0-95.9%	115	18.7%	53	8.6%	76	21.5%	277	45.1%
94.0-94.9%	253	41.2%	114	18.6%	125	35.4%	183	29.8%
93.0-93.9%	137	22.3%	152	24.8%	62	17.6%	36	5.9%
92.0-92.9%	52	8.5%	110	17.9%	36	10.2%	6	1.0%
91.0-91.9%	9	1.5%	73	11.9%	9	2.5%	1	.2%
90.0-90.9%	4	.6%	44	7.2%	2	.6%	0	
89.0-89.9%	1	.2%	25	4.1%	1	.3%	1	.2%
Less than 89.0%	2	.4%	18	2.9%	5	1.4%	1	.2%
Total # Districts	614	100.0%	613	99.9%	353	100.0%	614	100.0%
Does Not Apply		1		261				
Average	93.3%		91.5%		92.3%		94.7%	
Median	94.4%		93.1%		94.5%		95.2%	

[1]Source: *OCCD-5 Report, Attendance Rates in Percent, 1982-83 School Year,* Ohio Department of Education.

each day. Assuming a 180 day school year, a total of about 22 million school days were lost because of absence. If a 5% absence rate is what is expected for excused reasons, about 30,000 more students were out each day than should have been, and at least 5.5 million days were unnecessarily lost.

The data for Ohio also indicate that attendance is not the same for every grade category. The highest attendance is typically in elementary school and the lowest is in secondary.

The average attendance figures for Ohio by grade category for the 1982-83 school year and the previous 11 school years are listed on Table 2. According to this information, rates fluctuate from year to year within a limited range but there is basic stability in attendance rates in Ohio. While every tenth of a percent change in the rate can involve several thousand students and days of lost schooling, there is basic stability.

The data also indicate that statewide the 1982-83 data are an improvement over the previous several years. Also of note, kindergarten attendance has been increasing steadily over time, while junior high attendance has had the clearest downward trend despite an up-turn in 1982-83.

District Level Date for Ohio Districts During the 1982-83 School Year

Not all districts in Ohio have attendance rates that are the same as the state average. Individual district rates fall in a wide range. For example, total attendance rates for individual districts ranged between 85.0% and 97.1% during the 1982-83 school year. Similarly, district level rates for elementary attendance ranged between 86.6% and 97.6%; junior high rates ranged between 81.2% and 97.8%; and high school attendance rates ranged between 76.8% and 99.2%.

Table 3 provides a summary of the distribution of attendance rates for the 614 districts in Ohio during the 1982-83 school year. The table provides data on the number of districts and proportion of all districts reporting rates that fall in each of ten intervals. This is reported for total attendance, elementary, junior high, and high school. In addition, the table reports the average rates for the state and the median for all districts in the state.

The data on Table 3 indicate that the state average is not a very accurate description of what is typical in Ohio school districts. Most school districts have much better attendance rates than the state average for each of the categories reported here. In fact, 83% of the districts had

rates greater than the state average for total attendance. Similarly, 73% of the districts had elementary rates in excess of the state average for elementary students; 93% of the districts had junior high rates in excess of the junior high average; and 79% of the districts had rates in excess of the state average for secondary students.

The fact that most districts have rates that are better than the state average indicates that the average is not a good standard for assessing individual district rates. The median for each category, except for secondary, is very close to the 5% absence rate that is typically identified as desirable. This suggests that a very large share of districts are doing very well, that the median is a better standard against which to assess district level attendance data, and that the goal of a 5% absence rate is not unrealistic to expect for most school districts.

The average attendance data for Ohio and the distribution of data among districts both indicate that secondary schools are the major location of attendance problems in Ohio. Not only is the state average the lowest for secondary attendance, but a larger number and share of districts had below average rates, and a much smaller share of districts had rates of secondary attendance in the range of excellence. The data show that 20.0% of the districts had secondary rates below an already low average of 91.5%. Only 12.5% of the districts had secondary rates of 95.0% or more compared to 25.4% of the districts for total attendance, 32.0% of the districts for junior high, and 62.8% for elementary.

The data on the distribution of rates also indicate that there are several school districts where the rates of attendance differ significantly from what is typical, and are lower than the state average. The primary attendance problems in Ohio are in those districts with low total attendance rates or low rates for individual grade categories.

About one-tenth of the districts (57) had rates between 85.0% and 92.9% for total attendance. They are listed on Table 4. Half of these fell in the lowest decile during three recent years, indicating that these problems are chronic in some places. There were 16 districts with absenteeism that was two to three times greater than what should be taking place. The list of districts in the decile with the lowest total attendance indicates that all types of districts can have attendance problems. These districts should be the focus for improving attendance in Ohio.

In addition to the districts with low total attendance,

TABLE 4

Ohio School Districts with Lowest Rates of Attendance in Order by Rate from Lowest—1982-83 School Year[1]

District	Rate	District	Rate	District	Rate
Cleveland City	85.0%	Cleveland Hts — University Hts. City	92.2%	Reading Community City	92.7%
North Bass Local	86.2%	Garfield Hts. City	92.2%	Clay Local	92.8%
Dayton City	89.9%	Goshen Local	92.2%	Zanesville City	92.8%
Northridge (Montgomery Co.) Local	90.3%	St. Bernard—Elmwood Place City	92.2%	Highland Local	92.8%
Cincinnati City	90.4%	New Boston Local	92.2%	Meigs Local	92.8%
Willoughby-Eastlake City	90.5%	Rock Hill Local	92.3%	Amanda-Clearcreek Local	92.8%
Youngstown City	90.7%	Trimble Local	92.3%	Middletown City	92.8%
Columbus City	91.2%	Alliance City	92.4%	Wilmington	92.8%
Campbell City	91.3%	New Carlisle—Bethel Local	92.4%	New Richmond Ex. Village	92.8%
Steubenville City	91.3%	Franklin City	92.4%	Loveland City	92.8%
Lake Local	91.6%	Buckeye Local	92.4%	Hillsboro City	92.8%
Springfield City	91.7%	Madison Local	92.4%	Ohio Valley Local	92.8%
Howland Local	91.8%	Lorain City	92.5%	Painesville City	92.9%
New Miami Local	91.9%	Ashtabula Area City	92.5%	Ripley-Union-Lewis Local	92.9%
Niles City	91.9%	Warren City	92.5%	Clinton-Massie Local	92.9%
Windham Ex. Village	91.9%	Bucyrus City	92.6%	Walnut Township Local	92.9%
Hamilton City	92.0%	Whitehall City	92.6%	Cambridge City	92.9%
Southern (Perry Co.) Local	92.0%	Edison Local	92.6%	Mansfield City	92.9%
Norwood City	92.0%	Conneaut Area City	92.7%	Jefferson Township Local	92.9%
East Clinton Local	92.1%	Miamisburg City	92.7%	Little Miami Local	92.9%
Fayetteville-Perry Local	92.1%	Preble-Shawnee Local	92.7%	Clermont-Northeastern Local	92.9%
East Liverpool City	92.1%	South Point Local	92.7%	Vinton County Local	92.9%
Toledo City	92.1%			Valley Local	92.9%

[1]Source: *OCCD-5 Report, Attendance Rates in Percent, Total Rates, 1982-83 School Year,* Ohio Department of Education, Division of Computer Services and Statistical Reports.

there are several districts with individual grade level rates that differ substantially from what is typical in most districts. While most districts with low total attendance have at least one grade category that is also low and as many as four, there are many districts with individual grade level problems that would be unnoticed if total attendance were the only measure of participation. Identification of all locations with attendance problems requires a grade level review.

Why Students Stay Away

Regular school attendance occurs when each eligible student consistently makes the effort to get to school each day for the 180 days in a typical school year. Students are motivated to make that effort by a number of factors: they are legally required to attend; they want to conform or fear the negative consequences of not conforming; they believe school participation is worthwhile or necessary for something they want; they find the experience enjoyable, stimulating, or rewarding for social and/or intellectual reasons; their parents make them go because of the same reasons. Oftentimes, all of these factors work together. In some cases, one factor may outweigh others.

The legal and cultural expectations for school attendance mean that failure to attend school is a problem. Valuable educational time is lost. There is particular concern when that absence is due to unacceptable reasons. Student absenteeism is rarely found to be an innocent act of "playing hooky." When it is chronic and persistent, there are a number of explanations.

The research to discover or test explanations of absenteeism tends to focus at four levels: (a) individual and/or family characteristics; (b) the school and in-school factors; (c) the general environment; and (d) society (Birman and Natriello, 1978; *Student Absenteeism*, 1977).

The following review of the research about causes of absenteeism is organized by these four categories. It is evident in almost every discussion that seeks to explain why students stay away that there are many causes, that they often interact, that the causes are different for different people, and that the dynamic of this decision is complex.

A. Individual and Family Characteristics

A common focus in the search for explanations is the individual who is truant. The fact is that it is the individual who exhibits the behavior. In addition, because school participation is "normal" behavior and truancy is therefore deviant, it leads to concern for the sources of personal differences.

Much of the research looks at the characteristics of students who are truant and elicits from truant youth their reasons for staying away (*Non-Attendance at School*, 1980; Galloway, 1980; Nielson and Gerber, 1979). The research often gathers information about the personal, social, and educational characteristics of truant youth and their family background such as their socio-economic status, academic achievement, patterns of sibling attendance, history of other problems and family health problems (*Student Absenteeism*, 1977).

This research shows that there are some characteristics that are frequently associated with the truant youth. Nielson and Gerber, for example, found in their study of chronically truant youth that about half had repeated classes and were older than their classmates, about three-quarters of those students came from families with "multiple stresses," and many had siblings with attendance problems. Low economic status is common. Similarly, common characteristics of truants in a British study were difficult family circumstances, low attainment, high mobility, and a history of contact with the legal system (*Perspectives on Attendance*, 1981). These findings are also reflected in the observations of one practitioner's view of the personal problems that are reflected in absenteeism:

> *Every segment of society has its children with "low self concepts," inadequate grasp of the basic skills, little ambition or drive, children who may be too immature for high school . . . children who are slow, recalcitrant, confused or just at a rough spot in their lives. (Yaffe, 1982)*

This search into common characteristics gives an indication of a certain group of students who may be "at risk" for truancy, but these common characteristics do not explain truancy. Several problems stem from these circumstances and characteristics, which can affect the desire and ability to participate. These start to provide some insights into the causes of truancy. Four of the most common child-based causes that are implied in this research or explicity identified are reviewed here.

(1) Schooling is a low priority. Galloway (1980) found in his research on truant primary and secondary students that a variety of personal problems reduced the position of school attendance in the family's scale of priorities. Social and medical problems within the home needed attention and interferred with participation. Non-attendance was not a reflection of the child's or parent's feelings about the school.

Family responsibilities often interfere with participation. Attendance workers in Cleveland noted that children from poor families often are needed to take on other important family tasks (Kaeser and Van Fleet, 1977). Practitioners also note that child care needs and other demands on school-aged parents interfere with school attendance for these young people.

(2) School absence is related to school failure. The relationship between achievement and absenteeism is the subject of considerable discussion and research (*Student Absenteeism*, 1977). It seems safe to say that academic failure or low achievement are common characteristics of the truant, that low achievement has many causes, not just ability, and that not being in school contributes to low achievement. It also seems safe to say that students who experience failure in school can become discouraged learners and stay away from school. Many students with achievement problems become truants (Mahood, 1981). Achievement problems can be both the cause and a result of truancy.

(3) School avoidance is the result of the absent youth's psychological problems. In the search for psychological explanations for attendance problems, researchers typically identify three psychological problems that may lead to school avoidance. They are school phobia, peer phobia, and authority-defying behavior (Birman and Natriello, 1979; Nielson and Gerber, 1979; Atkeson and Forehand, 1978).

School phobic children avoid school and have violent re-

actions to attending because of family problems. The student complains about school, but these complaints are viewed as a type of rationalization for other problems not based in the school at all. A very small number of truant children have this problem.

Peer phobia is another psychologically rooted problem. Many truant youth, according to Nielson and Gerber's study, for example, are children who lack friends. Since school is a social experience, the child avoids school in order to avoid facing their peers.

Authority-defying youth stay away from school for two reasons. First, they cannot cope with the authority structure of the school. Impersonal and bureaucratic school structures are particularly difficult. Second, they stay away as an expression of their defiance of expectations for their behavior. This group is also associated with youth who become involved in delinquent behavior (Birman and Natriello, 1978; Nielson and Gerber, 1979).

Other psychological characteristics that are commonly associated with the truant are low aspirations and self-concepts, and difficulty dealing with growing up. These personal limits affect the school experience and may result in whether or not the child forms relationships and is motivated to participate.

(4) **Family and peer support for attendance are weak.** Other commonly identified explanations for truancy, often expressed by those responsible for enforcing student attendance, are that children who do not attend lack encouragement from parents to do so, and are pulled away by peers (Kaeser and Van Fleet, 1977). The ability of peers to influence children not to attend is often associated with the weakness of parent control.

The research does not really support the notion that the parents of truant youth do not support education, which would contribute to their non-attendance. One research study (Nielson and Gerber, 1979) indicated that parents of truant youth support the value of education and that their view of education was not related to the truancy of their children. Galloway also observed that many truant youth were home with their parent's knowledge, but not their consent.

The perception that the problem of truancy is a reflection of parental commitment may be the result of different problems. Attendance workers in Cleveland, for example, reported that parents who have lost control of their children request court involvement as a way to make their children attend. Truant children commonly have had little contact with people for whom education has been a rewarding experience (Nielson and Gerber, 1979). Parents also express that they value education and want their children to attend, but have difficulty forcing participation because of the way they and their children are treated by the school.

B. School-Based Causes of Truancy.

The focus on school related causes of truancy does not ignore or disregard personal responsibility and personal factors that affect school participation. It does suggest that school-based forces affect student motivation and the chances for success for many children, and therefore affect participation by all students. Those students who have special problems or needs and do not fit easily into the "standard" school approach are especially vulnerable to school policies and practices.

The research and discussion of school-based causes of attendance problems focus on several school issues. One concern is school practices and organizational problems that inhibit the smooth running of schools, and thereby affect attendance. They also include those practices and organizational issues that inhibit service to certain young people and affect their participation. Another issue is the level of commitment to serving all children, which can undermine participation.

Unsatisfactory relationships between staffs, and students and parents; ineffective instruction and poorly supervised staff; low expectations for student attendance or performance; perceived inequality of the reward structure; teacher absenteeism; limited and inflexible scheduling; lack of choices and an unsuitable curriculum; and arbitrary standards or arbitrary rule enforcement are ways in which some school personnel execute their responsibility, which affect student interest in participating and their success (*Student Absenteeism*, 1977). These factors undermine teacher morale and effectiveness, and student motivation. They can mean a total breakdown in the educational process or make the school experience unrewarding for some students, and create special problems for the marginal student.

Personal care is one of the qualities of the school environment that students frequently identify as significant to their motivation to participate. Studies call attention to a few specific issues that undermine this quality and therefore contribute to absenteeism. Sentelle (1980), for example, observed that multiple course offerings and multiple teachers at the secondary school level are structural problems that may encourage truancy by making the situation more impersonal. A study of classroom factors associated with high and low participation also indicated the importance of certain teacher attributes. Students were absent more from classes that they perceived as high in levels of competition and teacher control, and low in teacher support (Moos and Moos, 1978).

A study comparing schools with high and low dropout rates indicates the importance of the student's perceptions of the opportunity structure of the school to the decision to participate (Wehlage, Stone and Kliebard, 1980). Schools with higher retention rates were more likely than low retention rate schools to accommodate and value differences in learning styles, reward performance rather than rank, and to be flexible and responsive with individuals who were identified as marginal students. Marginal students responded in those schools that worked to minimize bureaucratic and impersonal elements of the school experience. Staff who were willing to take an "extended" role with these students by showing a personal interest were successful.

The attitude towards children is also very important and is often reflected in structural accommodations, the use of authority, and teacher roles and expectations. Some schools simply do not think that all children should be there. They see no responsibility to serve those who do not attend each day. They have a "take it or leave it" attitude. In those cases, little effort is made to encourage participation or to respond to individual needs and differences.

C. General Environment

A wide range of environmental factors is also identified to explain some absenteeism (*Student Absenteeism*, 1977). Some of the factors that fall in this category are a long distance to school, especially for those who must walk; in-

clement weather; and the absence of options other than school time to attend to personal business.

D. Society-Based Causes

Education is often promoted as a key to access to employment. During times of high unemployment, racial barriers to employment for some, and the demand for even more education for many jobs, affect the link between education and employment. One explanation for absenteeism is a mismatch between schooling and employment caused by these factors (Birman and Natriello, 1978).

It is often said that the school is a microcosm of society. What happens in school is an extension of social issues. Social stratification and racism are two social factors that express themselves in schools and in the opportunities for success that they provide. Some argue that these factors make it inevitable that certain children will not be well served by school and will truant and drop out. Schools simply are replicating the social order and will not change because society does not want them to do differently (Birman and Natriello, 1978).

Interventions to Improve Attendance

Schools have a major role to play in assuring widespread participation. They take two basic approaches. The most common approach is the legally outlined one, which is to account for children and then try to intervene with those who are absent for unacceptable reasons. The second basic approach is much less common, a conscious preventive approach. The prevention mode focuses for the most part on the school and making it the type of place that is positive and supportive of the diverse needs of its clients. These approaches to some extent relate to the two most frequently identified causes of absenteeism: the child and the school.

Child Accounting and Intervention with the Absent Student

School districts have a legally mandated responsibility to enforce compulsory attendance laws and, therefore, to intervene when students are absent for illegal reasons. As part of this requirement and because of the importance of students being in the classroom, each school district has some system for monitoring individual attendance on a daily basis and intervening when a child is absent. The exact system that is used to monitor daily attendance and to investigate absenteeism, the length of absence that triggers action, the type of intervention that is used, and the priority and resources that this activity receives vary by district policy and building practice.

For the most part, building level personnel have the primary responsibility to monitor attendance and seek solutions. Individual teachers must identify who is absent and act themselves, or bring that absence to the attention of someone who is responsible for acting. In some cases, action depends on another person reviewing attendance lists and flagging individuals for action. The process, in any case, depends on a decentralized approach to identifying individuals who need attention.

Once students are identified, several interventions may be used. Parent contact and notification is the most basic and often the most effective intervention (Sheats and Dunkleberger, 1979; *Student Absenteeism*, 1977; Kaeser and Van Fleet, 1977).

Many administrators and educators view absenteeism as a type of discipline problem, and therefore the intervention is some form of punishment. Demerits, detention, suspension, and grade reduction are common forms of punishment (Nielson and Gerber, 1979; Rodell, 1979; Birman and Natriello, 1978; *Children Out of School*, 1974).

A third intervention that schools readily employ is the use of ancillary services. In many cases investigation of the problem leads to identification of a variety of personal problems. Some type of counseling or supportive service is needed. Many school systems provide some support services or make referrals to other public or private agencies (Minkler, 1980; Birman and Natriello, 1978; Atkeson and Forehand, 1978). Some promising actions include providing assistance to families related to their children (Maurer, 1982), and involving the family in interventions that the schools are attempting (Atkeson and Forehand, 1978). An in-depth case approach to individual needs is also advocated as important to truly solving problems (Minkler, 1980).

Many schools also try to address student motivation problems by providing positive rewards for attendance. These efforts try to change student behavior by increasing student interest in the school, and changing the general attitudes held by students about the importance of school.

The ultimate intervention that schools may use is legal prosecution. The law makes it possible for school districts to take students or their parents to court to force participation. Institutional placement or removal of children from the custody of their parents are two interventions that courts may order.

Some school strategies to identify and intervene with individual students who are absent are criticized by researchers, practitioners and child advocates for not being effective. The complaints relate to basic elements of effective problem solving: the desire to improve the situation, an accurate assessment of the causes of the problem, and effective implementation of activities that will lead to improved attendance.

The most common criticisms focus on school implementation of strategies for attendance monitoring, parent notification, and counseling. These strategies depend on a very decentralized approach to identification of students who need attention and contact. There are a variety of weaknesses which can occur, and the fact that they do occur and go unattended casts doubt on the desire of educators to assure that the absenteeism is solved.

Duke and Meckel (1980), for example, observed school attendance practices in two schools with high absenteeism and found inconsistent decisions among staff members about when absence was sufficient to warrant attention, and whose absence was worthy of intervention. They found:

> *School personnel pursued with vigor only those absent students who were expected to have the best chances for academic success or were known to have parents who would complain if not informed when their child was absent illegally. Unfortunately, these criterion tended to exclude many minority and lower socioeconomic status students. (Duke and Meckel, 1980)*

This breakdown in the existing mechanism for identification of students in order to trigger a variety of school interventions is noted in other reports (*Recommendations for*

Improving Attendance, 1983; Kaeser and Van Fleet, 1977).

The researchers found this breakdown occurs in part because of unclear role definitions among staff and school structure problems that fail to provide sufficient motivation to assure participation. Other critics of this process also identify the lack of clear policy, careless "clerical and business phases" of the accounting process, and different levels of commitment to assuring participation as problems that undermine effective implementation of this approach (Minkler, 1980; Duke and Meckel, 1980; Whitehead and Marshall, 1980).

Parent contact and individual counseling are widely supported for their effectiveness. However, these strategies are often undermined by heavy case loads which hamper attention to individuals (Kaeser and Van Fleet, 1977). To the extent that resource allocations reflect priorities, insufficient resources for implementing these strategies can indicate little commitment to improving attendance.

Many complaints stem from concern that strategies are ill-conceived or do not address the right problems. For example, Duke and Meckel observed:

> *School personnel did not possess much specialized knowledge of the origin of poor attendance or how to deal with it clinically. Often they seemed content to explain poor attendance in terms of family problems. . . . This tendency reduced the likelihood that a "hard" look would be taken at ways in which the school itself could be contributing to attendance problems.*

Specific criticism is made of many of the punitive interventions. Nielson and Gerber (1979), for example, observed that punishment for students who already feel alienated from school and have stopped attending for that reason creates more hostility, and therefore is counter-productive to participation. Furthermore, punishment means that real problems go unidentified and unaddressed. Suspension for absenteeism is also criticized because it creates more barriers for the student who is either alienated or has academic problems (*School Suspensions, Are They Helping Children*, 1975). Grade reduction for absenteeism is another punishment that causes some children who are already turned-off to give up altogether because success is even more remote. Research on the effects of court intervention with chronic truants also suggests this intervention has little effect on school participation of most children who have had court involvement (Alliance for Cooperative Justice, 1982).

School Changes to Improve Participation

A school change approach to absenteeism identifies absenteeism as a school problem and not just the child's problem, and argues for the school to change, not just the children. This approach makes sure not only that the system of accounting for students is efficient and intervention with truants is timely, productive, and designed to solve problems, but also that schools provide an educational program that children will attend (*Empty Desks*, n.d.).

Schools that provide an educational program that children will attend make a conscious effort to make sure all children attend and assess their own success in these terms (Wehlage, Stone and Kliebard, 1980).

One thrust towards assuring well attended schools is to be sure that the basic program and environment are effective and conducive to learning. A second approach is to consider how the school structure, organization, instruction, and rewards affect students who have other problems that the school experience can either positively or negatively affect. Finally, schools are aware that they may be more responsive to some students and styles of learning than others. They set about trying to remove policies and practices that defeat some students, and replace them with efforts that encourage all children.

The opportunity structure of the school seems to be especially critical to participation decisions made by students who are traditionally identified as "marginal" because of personal problems or differences from the mainstream of most public schools (Wehlage, Stone and Kliebard, 1980). The chances for academic and social success as noted in the personal reasons for truancy are very important to participation. Many of the specific school strategies that appear to have positive effects on participation reduce student alienation and support different learning styles.

Some schools establish alternative programs that are specifically designed to provide students who experience failure, feel powerless, or have negative views about themselves and their futures, with experiences that provide warm relationships, assure success and increase their sense of power and positive images of themselves (Arnove and Strout, 1980; Sentelle, 1980). In some cases the basic school program is changed to assure these basic qualities. Some examples of school changes noted in the literature that have this effect are: activities to increase student roles in affecting the school and in school governance (Brimm et al., 1979; Rodell, 1979; Birman and Natriello, 1978), instructional changes and rewards based on progress not rank (Wehlage, Stone and Kliebard, 1980; Brimm et al., 1979; *Student Absenteeism*, 1977), and opportunities for faculty-student interaction (Wehlage, Stone and Kliebard, 1980; Neilson and Gerber, 1979). Other changes that are identified as having positive attendance implications include reorganization of days and routines, modifications in the curriculum, and work on the social climate (Brimm et al., 1979; Birman and Natriello, 1978).

The Citizens' Council's Positions on Attendance Problems and Their Resolution

The Citizens' Council for Ohio Schools has given considerable attention to the issue of student attendance and absenteeism. Our perspective on the legal requirements for participation, the need for action, and views of the problem that can lead to useful interventions are summarized here.

1. The Council supports the legally mandated expectation that public schools should serve all children and all children should attend. Ohio's laws that both guarantee all children access to schooling and require them to participate represent an important commitment to children and to their personal growth, and accurately reflect the social expectation of how much education children must have as a prerequisite to access to adult roles. Removing this requirement would not remove the necessity to have this amount of education. The challenge is not only to make sure that children are in school, but that they are being provided the services that will help them meet their potential.
2. These laws hold the student accountable for participating and the society and school personnel accountable for serving students. We agree that it is a shared responsibility. Unfortunately, the sanctions for failure to meet this responsibility only affect children and their parents. The emphasis for compliance is put on the child and family. Greater emphasis is needed on guaranteeing school district responsibility.
3. The provisions in compulsory education laws that permit legal prosecution of violators should be changed. Incarceration and fines are inappropriate and ineffective. Furthermore, many local courts are beginning to refuse to handle these cases because they are inappropriate uses of the limited resources of the legal system. Truant students can be frustrating, but the best chances for true changes will result from treating truancy as a complex problem for which a variety of school, social change, and social service responses that are responsive to individual children are needed.
4. School districts rightfully should establish local policies and regulations that set high expectations for student participation. Regular participation is important and children need clear indications of what is expected of them. We have three reservations, however, about local attendance policies and regulations.
   A. The adoption and implementation of a policy related to attendance is only the beginning of school district responsibility related to this problem. The adoption of an attendance policy is not the same as a vigorous school district effort to assure that all students participate.
   B. Policies that rely heavily on negative sanctions as the basis for assuring participation are inadequate and may be counter-productive. Grade reduction, suspension, and expulsion are common punishments for absenteeism. All three of these responses create problems for students which can discourage rather than support participation.
   C. When regulations include negative sanctions, they must be applied equally and include proper due process protections.
5. Regardless of the cause of student absence, school personnel must see assuring high levels of attendance as their responsibility.
6. Because school attendance is important, it is a worthwhile expenditure of educational resources to work to assure maximum student participation. If school administrators do not have as a priority assuring that students participate in their schools, they can communicate to students that schooling and attendance are not valued. Furthermore, when efforts to improve attendance produce coordinated school efforts, well managed schools, responsive educational practices, and a supportive school climate, all children benefit.
7. Since children attend school in classrooms in individual buildings, the emphasis of attendance monitoring and problem solving should be decentralized.
8. Accurate data collection, coupled with review and analysis, are essential for identifying those individual children, classrooms, buildings, or districts with attendance problems. The basic records on who attends must be used to monitor individual behavior and should be aggregated to develop classroom, building and district rates. This information must be reviewed on a periodic basis to determine whether or not a problem exists that requires special attention. This is an essential school management activity for principals, central administrators, and school boards. The findings should be used to trigger interventions where necessary and to keep the community informed of what is taking place.
9. Community standards will determine what level of absenteeism is acceptable. We, however, believe that individual, classroom, or district rates of attendance that deviate significantly from other comparable units, are cause for concern and should generate special attention.
10. Student absenteeism is a complex problem. The Council believes that the following ideas about this problem and the way to proceed in finding solutions can lead to interventions that will make a difference:
    A. A commitment to serving all children is a prerequisite to finding solutions to this problem.
    B. The standard view of absenteeism as the child's problem is too narrow. Attention must be given both to the individual child who is not attending and to classrooms, school buildings, and school districts where children do not attend. The needs of the individual and the dynamics of the institution both deserve attention, if attendance for the individual or the institution is to be improved.
    C. While absenteeism appears to be a single problem—children are not in school—it is usually a symptom of some other problem or problems affecting the behavior of individual children or large

numbers of children in a given school or classroom. Therefore, solutions are needed which do not treat all absences the same; they should address the underlying problems and involve broad thinking about the problem and remedies.

D. Many of the causes of absenteeism are best understood as barriers which prevent participation. It is productive to examine ways to remove barriers. Interventions that create barriers must be avoided.

E. Punishment is the most common response to absenteeism. While students must be held accountable for their behavior, punishment is a limited and often counter-productive response. This is not a school discipline problem.

F. As is the case with most complex problems, a complex set of responses is needed. A few tacked on programs or regulations will not solve a serious problem.

11. High levels of absenteeism at the classroom, school building, or district level should prompt immediate concern for the quality of the educational program. Efforts to encourage individual children to return to school will most likely be useless in the absence of efforts to simultaneously resolve school-based problems that may be generating the high levels of absenteeism. The school-based problems may indicate either a general breakdown in the basic management, security, and quality of the program and instruction, which affect all students; or they may indicate a mismatch between the opportunity structure and the motivation of a diverse student population that may have special needs. Both are worthy of concern.

12. The Council believes that the legal expectation that the public schools should serve all children is not unrealistic. The key to high levels of participation continues to rest with constructive efforts to make the school experience responsive to the diverse needs of the students who look to public schools for their education. The challenge is to find ways in which the structure, rewards and content of the school experience can be expanded to assure that all children find reasons to participate that outweigh the reasons to stay away.

13. Citizens have a role to play in assuring high levels of attendance. They need to know how well schools are attended. They may need to stimulate action, if school personnel do not share their concern for this problem or are unwilling to take a look at school-based causes of absenteeism. Furthermore, their views of appropriate education are essential to assuring that the school environment is one that responds to community needs and values, and motivates a diverse population.

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CHAPTER II

Disciplinary Exclusion: Suspension and Expulsion

In most communities and neighborhoods in Ohio, some children are out of school each day because their behavior in school is unacceptable to the adults in charge. School personnel punish these students by excluding them from participation. Thus one of the ironies of public education is that while regular school attendance is a major concern, school exclusion is an acceptable response when students misbehave.

Educators have many responsibilities. Two related responsibilities are creating an orderly learning environment so instruction can occur and so that children and adults will feel secure in school, and teaching students appropriate behavior for the school setting. These responsibilities mean that school personnel must deal with student behavior.

Boards of education are responsible for setting policy related to what is acceptable behavior, and proper procedures school personnel should follow when students violate these standards. They must also establish when serious forms of punishment may be used. The building level staff, however, are key. They set the tone for a building, establish expectations and create the opportunities that affect behavior, and deal with negative behavior on a daily basis. They have a great deal of discretion within district policy in how to fulfill their responsibilities. The way in which they use their authority, how they assess individual student behavior, and how they handle students are subjective and individualized.

Some children misbehave. They behave in ways that in the judgement of school personnel are inappropriate, interfere with instruction, or disrupt the environment. Some misbehavior is irritating but not serious, and some is chronic; there are also cases where children exhibit threatening or illegal types of behavior. In some cases the behavior is due to personal problems, unmet educational needs, frustration, or a school environment that is poorly managed or lacking purpose and community support.

It is normal for students not to behave perfectly at all times, and it is normal for school personnel to address that misbehavior when it occurs. Punishment is one strategy that school personnel may use in their pursuit of order and proper behavior. School exclusion by suspension, expulsion or emergency removal are all forms of punishment allowed by Ohio law. Suspension is exclusion for one to ten school days; expulsion is exclusion for more than ten days, and up to one semester; and emergency removal is a short-term exclusion that may result in formal suspension or expulsion.

It seems that sending children home from school when their behavior is not acceptable is a practice as old as the schools. Courts have upheld the right of school personnel to exclude students for certain periods of time. The Burton case in Wisconsin in 1878 confirmed the legality of suspending students, and a 1906 case in New York held that expulsion was constitutional (Hestor, 1977).

Until recently, these practices received little scrutiny. School staffs had wide freedom to exclude students as they felt was necessary. There was little regulation of who could exclude students, for what reasons, or following what procedures. Furthermore, this was a practice that was hidden from public view. No data collection was required, and no system existed to assure that educators were exercising this significant power in a fair or useful way.

In the last 15 years civil rights and student advocates, the courts, legislatures, and the federal government have all given attention to school practices that exclude students. Civil rights and student advocates brought the issue to the public agenda by documenting discrimination in the use of exclusion, lack of procedural protections, and excessive and arbitrary use of exclusion. Simultaneously, litigation by a group of students brought the issue of fair treatment by school personnel in the use of exclusion into the discussion and added legitimacy and leverage to those seeking changes in school practices.

These activities have resulted in changes in state laws governing the use of suspension, significant expenditures of federal funds to address problems of discrimination in the use of disciplinary exclusion, federal oversight and monitoring of school practices, and widespread consciousness of this issue and related problems. The controversy has also stimulated educators to pursue other strategies for keeping order, and has helped concerned citizens advocate for different school practices. In many cases, it has resulted in changes in school practices, while also changing the ways in which we evaluate how well schools are doing.

The Controversy About School Exclusion

School exclusion made its debut as an issue in the context of southern school desegregation. In 1973 the Southern Regional Council and the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial issued the document, *The Student Pushout*, which documented a huge increase in the use of suspension and expulsion following desegregation in many southern school districts, and disproportionate exclusion of black children. The report charged that disciplinary exclusion was being used by school personnel as a way to resist desegregation. The often arbitrary exclusion of black students violated their constitutionally guaranteed right to equal treatment under the law, the main issue being addressed by the desegregation of the schools. In addition to the unequal treatment issue, the report showed school personnel were suspending students for certain behaviors involving free speech which is also a constitutionally protected right. They also found school personnel treating students in a

"capricious and arbitrary" manner when using their authority to exclude. For all of these reasons, the report argued that school personnel were violating the Constitution and federal law, and school personnel should change their use of exclusionary discipline.

The report also established the concept of the student pushout. Harassment by school personnel, particularly by the repeated use of suspension, forced many students to drop out. These students, according to the report, were victims of arbitrary and hurtful school practices that were ways for school personnel to resist desegregation. The authors observed:

> *Desegregation in and of itself does not produce pushouts. But often this continuing resistance to desegregation by educators has helped to create the climate for increased numbers of pushouts.*

These findings and complaints about disciplinary exclusion during the desegregation of southern schools were reenforced the following year by the Children's Defense Fund's publication, *Children Out of School in America*. This document found disproportionate exclusion of minority children in a sample of school districts from across the nation. It also documented ways in which school personnel were unfair in using their authority to exclude students, including a lack of procedural protections. The report questioned the value of exclusion as a technique, and expressed further concern for the lack of fairness in the way school personnel use their authority. It questioned the specific offenses being punished by exclusion in many districts, the reasons school personnel gave for using this punishment, and the effectiveness of this strategy for creating order.

These reports challenged educator use of exclusionary discipline practices on two basic constitutional issues: equal treatment and due process. By showing the disproportionate effect of disciplinary exclusion practices on minority children, they argued denial of equal treatment and discrimination, which violate the Constitution and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The lack of fair play in the use of suspension and expulsion was evidence of a lack of due process which they argued was both unwise and illegal.

Due Process Concerns and Changes

The procedural issues related to capricious and arbitrary use of authority have had some resolution. A lawsuit filed in 1971, *Goss* v. *Lopez*, and finally decided by the United States Supreme Court in 1975, resulted in more complete procedural protections. Students from Columbus, Ohio, brought suit against that school district for the procedures that were followed when the plaintiffs were suspended from school, claiming their right to due process was violated.

The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution guarantees due process protection to citizens when actions by the government deprive a person of life, liberty, or property. Prior to the *Goss* v. *Lopez* decision, it was unclear whether or not students qualified for this protection in school exclusion practices. However, the court ruled that students had a liberty and property right to schooling and therefore due process protection was guaranteed. According to the Court's findings, the state law which provides students with a public education gives children a property interest in schooling. The liberty interest at stake is the student's reputation. Thus exclusionary discipline practices are so serious that children are covered by the Fourteenth Amendment's procedural protection requirement.

The decision required that students be given proper notice and a fact-finding hearing. States were left to design the proper procedures that would comply.

At the time of the *Goss* decision the Supreme Court also decided the *Wood* v. *Strickland* case. This case strengthened the impact of the *Goss* decision by holding school boards liable in cases where they know constitutional rights are violated.

The *Goss* decision prompted the redrafting of state laws and local policies governing procedures required in disciplinary exclusion cases. While legal decisions do not always assure the required behavior, this case set standards for school practices. The decision has been widely disseminated so that school personnel are aware of the case and the standards. According to one research report which observed school discipline practices in many schools (Lufler, 1979), school personnel are aware of the *Goss* decision and follow the required procedural requirements albeit with different levels of commitment to or understanding of the reasons for the requirements.

Discrimination Concerns and Changes

The early reports about school exclusion documented examples of overt discrimination against black children in the use of disciplinary exclusion and called attention to the statistical data that supported that charge. This put school discipline on the civil rights and desegregation agendas, where it remains.

Despite court decisions and regulations that make discrimination in school practices illegal, it is an issue that persists in many schools in many communities. Individual cases and the data on suspension by race indicate that minority students, and black students in particular, continue to be excluded disproportionately in many schools and districts.

There are many explanations for why black students and other minorities are often suspended at a higher rate than their white colleagues. These explanations are key to understanding why easy remedies do not exist. One explanation for the statistical evidence of discrimination is overt discrimination, as illustrated by cases cited in *The Student Pushout*. Many districts have taken care to curb the possibility of overt discrimination by administrators who make the decision to suspend a student. They work hard to assure that when children are brought to the attention of the building administrator for punishment, that two children involved in the same incident or guilty of the same infraction are treated the same way.

Ending overt discrimination may not remove the statistical evidence of differential treatment. A second explanation is that despite scrupulous care to enforce rules evenly, the rules may be culturally and racially biased. It is commonly understood that school personnel tend to be white and middle class, and that the rule system in most schools reflects that culture (Wehlage, Stone and Kliebard, 1980).

While no group tolerates violence, criminal behavior, or discourteous behavior, suspension is used in some cases for other types of behavior that may be interpreted as negative by one group and not another (wearing hats and when to remove them is a classic example). Even if educa-

tors are careful to apply rules fairly, they may be enforcing a system of rules that is stacked against a certain group of children.

Junious Williams concluded after observing discipline practices in several schools over five years that the differential treatment of minority students is not due to unequal treatment when they reach the principal or administrator responsible for punishment. Rather, it is due to the referral process which depends on judgements by individual staff members (First and Mizell, 1980).

Other research on the discipline system helps to explain why referrals can contribute to differential treatment. In most cases, the discipline system is activated when an adult receives a complaint or witnesses a student misbehaving. Not everyone will react to an incident of misbehavior in the same way. Despite a set of rules, each staff person decides what behavior is inappropriate and worthy of intervention, and what type of intervention is appropriate. For a system to be completely consistent there must be agreement among all teachers and staff about what behavior is inappropriate, what it looks like when it happens, and what to do about it when it is found. There is rarely this type of agreement (*Education Week*, 1984). Thus, much of the apparent discrimination in serious forms of punishment, such as suspension, stems from the subjective nature of the process which leaves space for overt and subtle cultural conflicts, personality conflicts, and other personal biases to enter into disciplinary actions. Discrimination can occur. In fact, differential treatment of minorities may be the result of biases by a few teachers in a school building.

The data on suspension by race and reason support this view. Almost every school district and school has a code of conduct which includes a list of behavior that can be punished by exclusion from school. Data analysis on suspension by reason (Stevens, 1983; First and Mizell, 1980; Kaeser and Snyder, 1978) and observations of school practices indicate that there is little variation by race for offenses widely agreed to be serious examples of misconduct. The differential rates stem from those rule violations where there is less agreement among educators that the behavior is serious enough to warrant exclusion (e.g., smoking), less agreement that exclusion is appropriate (e.g., truancy), or where the violation is unclear (e.g., defy authority, disrespectful) and therefore extremely susceptible to subjective decision making. It is in these grey areas that rates of suspension vary the most by race.

A final concern is whether these data in any way reflect true differences in behavior; are differential rates justified? The response is complex. First, suspension data are not a very good reflection of how much misbehavior there is in any situation. The wide range in suspension rates among buildings within school districts and among buildings that serve the same type of students (Kaeser, August 1979), conversations with administrators, and observations of school practices (*Children Out of School*, 1974) indicate that the use of suspension is a matter of educator choice about the value of this type of intervention more than it is a matter of the level of misbehavior within the school. *Therefore, the data do not tell very much about the behavior of any children.*

A second response is that black students may behave in ways that are in conflict with the values of the staff in charge. The behavior may neither be threatening nor disrespectful, but is perceived to be by staff. Finally, one researcher has suggested that most schools do not provide an opportunity structure that meets the learning styles of many minority students (Jordan, October 31, 1983). This fact makes it more difficult for minority children to succeed and can result in their being viewed as behavior problems—which can be a self-fulfilling prophecy. The use of punishment is so complex that there is no clear evidence to suggest that high rates of suspension for minority students are justified by more negative behavior.

A third response is essentially that no one has given any evidence or argued that higher suspension rates are justified because these children cause more serious problems. In fact, consent decrees and other agreements by school districts indicate an appreciation that these differences in treatment are not fair. The causes are complex, but the end result must be addressed.

The federal government, student advocates, civil rights advocates and educators have used a variety of leverage points and continue to use them to force school personnel to acknowledge the existence of a problem and to take the time and make the effort needed to make sure that disciplinary exclusion is used fairly. While advocates have had some success in establishing that discrimination in school discipline is a critical problem and an illegal activity, solutions depend on changes in school practices. The needed changes in school practices require painstaking work on a school by school basis. Thus this is an issue that continues to receive attention from advocates and educators alike.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is the major source of leverage for monitoring the use of suspension and expulsion, and for requiring school personnel to change practices that result in differential treatment of minority students. The Act prohibits discrimination in federally funded programs. Since the federal government provides some funding to local school districts, school practices are affected by the requirements of this law. School discipline practices have been monitored for possible discrimination, and the legal enforcement mechanisms available for assuring fair treatment have been used related to discrimination in the use of suspension and expulsion.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 makes the Secretary of Education responsible for assuring that no federal dollars go to school districts that discriminate. To execute this responsibility, the Secretary must be assured that districts do not discriminate. Districts that apply for federal funds must give assurances that they do not discriminate, and the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) collects from school districts data related to a number of issues where discrimination may occur. These data are collected in the biennial Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Survey. OCR reviews these data to assure compliance with the law. If the data indicate the possibility of a violation of the law, or if citizens file complaints charging discrimination, OCR must investigate. If discrimination is found, the Secretary has the authority to withhold funds. Prior to that drastic step, the Department may enter into negotiations with the district. If these negotiations do not produce satisfactory arrangements, the case may be referred to the Justice Department for prosecution. This process, including an appeal procedure, precedes the ultimate cut in federal funding.

Starting in 1972, the OCR Survey included data on suspensions and expulsions by race. Until 1982 when expul-

sion data were dropped, the biennial survey continued to include data on both practices. This survey helps the Office for Civil Rights monitor discrimination in the use of school discipline, and gives citizens the needed data to monitor the problem in their own districts.

The civil rights enforcement mechanisms have been the subject of controversy over time. Many school personnel objected to the data collection requirements *(The Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Survey, 1977).* Civil rights activists have been critical of the lack of support given to OCR so that it can be effective, and of the lack of commitment by its leadership under various administrations to exercise its authority. Despite these problems, the data collected by OCR continue to be the main source of information for monitoring the use of these punishments and the OCR enforcement process continues to be a leverage point for change when problems are identified.

In addition to the legal inducements for ending discriminatory treatment in school exclusion, certain resources and incentives have also induced change. Title V of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 created Desegregation Assistance Centers which are regional resource centers that provide assistance to school districts requesting help during desegregation. Many of the teacher training projects addressed by desegregation assistance centers have focused on classroon conflict and directly address the differential effects of school discipline policy and practices on minority children.

The Emergency School Aid Act of 1974 provided special federal funds to school districts involved in school desegregation. Until its repeal in 1981, the funds available through this act were often used to address discrimination in school discipline, and the ways to reduce the use of school exclusion (e.g., Louisville. Milwaukee).

School desegregation cases frequently give attention to school discipline practices and the use of suspension and expulsion in particular, and have been another vehicle for change. The data on the differential impact of the use of disciplinary measures on minority children prior to desegregation in some cases (e.g., Cleveland) and following desegregation in others (e.g., Boston) have led to court action.

Courts have ordered districts to reduce disparate impacts by redrafting discipline policies (e.g., Cleveland, Detroit, Boston) and by reducing the use of disciplinary exclusion (e.g., Benton Harbor). The need for districts to address disparity of treatment in the context of desegregation is two-fold. First, if in fact it is the result of discrimination, then it must end. Second, such differences in treatment, regardless of their cause, promote a sense that the system is not fair. The judge in the Benton Harbor case expressed quite clearly that assuring that the system is fair is important in the context of desegregation:

> *Students' perception of and feeling of fairness in the schools is absolutely critical to the success of this or any desegregation plan. (Weckstein, 1982)*

Desegregation monitoring activities often include observation of the use of suspension and expulsion. Differential treatment of certain groups of students in the use of discipline continues to be a "second generation" desegregation problem. Some people view the degree to which disparity exists as an indicator of how well school districts are executing their responsibility to end constitutional violations.

Some efforts have also been made to use disparate rates of suspension or explusion of minorities as evidence of constitutional violations and as a basis for finding school districts guilty of discrimination. Plaintiffs in *Ross* v. *Saltmarsh* charged school personnel in Newburgh, New York, with violating their constitutional rights because of excessive exclusion of minority children. The case did not go to trial because the district signed a "consent decree" in which they agreed to eliminate all racial disparity in suspension rates by reducing the overall number of suspensions in the school districts, and by undertaking a wide range of activities to improve discipline practices and community relations (Weckstein, 1982).

Several other suits have been filed that claim racial discrimination in the use of school exclusion and violation of student rights. Several suits are pending (Weckstein, 1982).

The disproportionate exclusion of minority students continues in many districts. School personnel and advocates continue to search for ways to force action and resolve a problem with complex causes requiring complex solutions.

The Wisdom of Suspension and Expulsion

Much of the debate about disciplinary exclusion has centered on procedural protections and discrimination in the use of suspension and expulsion. Critics are also concerned about the fact that suspension and expulsion are used at all.

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) report, *Children Out of School in America,* states this concern directly:

> *We favor discipline and order within schools. But we question the current methods used to achieve these goals. We do not believe the answer to children's discipline problems lies in denying them schooling.*

The disciplinary exclusion controversy is not an educator versus advocate issue. While civil rights and student advocates have documented problems, issued publications, filed law suits about school practices, and called on the federal government to use its enforcement tools, they are not alone in having an opinion about these practices. For example, following the release of the CDF report on suspension in the mid-70's, the Delegate Assembly of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) at their annual meeting adopted this resolution:

> *AASA views with great concern the suspension and expulsion of students from the schools of our nation, particularly as it affects minorities. AASA urges that school administrators give positive leadership to develop alternatives to these practices. These alternatives must provide environments which meet the educational needs of the students and guarantee due process. (National School Public Relations Association, 1976)*

Furthermore, individual school personnel who must decide how to handle discipline problems and must create

order in their schools have very different views of the necessity of this intervention, its utility, and the circumstances when it is appropriate. Research reports (First and Mizell, 1980; Brodinsky, 1980; Parents Union for Public Schools, 1980; Kaeser 1979; SEPEP; 1977-78; *Children Out of School*, 1974) have documented these views.

All parties in the controversy seem to agree that schools need to be orderly, that children need to behave in ways that are not threatening and conform to normal social mores, that children should be held accountable for their behavior, and that educators are responsible for creating orderly school environments and intervening when children misbehave.

The controversy centers on whether or not school exclusion techniques are appropriate in this effort.

The issue is complex. The overriding concern of critics is that suspension and expulsion are too costly. School participation is so important that the individual's right to and need for education should not be denied easily. Critics believe that exclusionary practices should be avoided altogether, or limited to student behavior that is clearly threatening to others or is illegal (*Suspended Students—Suspended Learning*, 1982; First and Mizell, 1980; *School Suspensions*, 1975). Given this standard, critics become concerned when school personnel respond to a wide range of behavior and motivation problems by using suspension or expulsion. The data indicate in many school districts large numbers of children are excluded (Kaeser, 1984; *School Suspensions*, 1975). The data that are available by reasons (Kaeser and Hooper, 1983; Stevens, 1983; Kaeser and Snyder, 1978; *School Suspensions*, 1975) indicate that particularly in those situations where exclusion rates are high, this punishment is used for behavior that is not threatening, behavior that is often trivial, behavior that is chronic but not serious, and attendance problems. None of these behaviors fit the standard that would make exclusion acceptable to critics.

Critics also argue that exclusionary practices are inadequate responses. Misbehavior is often an expression of a need or some problem that may have a personal, societal, or school-based cause. As the Parent's Union observed:

> *Student misconduct can, and often does reflect the profound sense of frustration that students experience when their educational needs are not met and when they as well as their parents are effectively cut off from the decision making process which determines the very content of their education. (Suspended Students—Suspended Learning, 1982)*

Suspension and expulsion are inadequate because they fail to address causes. Furthermore, exclusion often increases alienation and damages the child, which makes the practice counter-productive. Finally, exclusion assigns all responsibility to the child without addressing other causes.

Critics argue that school personnel have an obligation to hold children accountable, to meet children's educational needs and provide an environment conducive to learning. If the only response to misbehavior by a child is to punish that student, especially using exclusion, the school personnel are abdicating their responsibilities and providing an inadequate response. This perspective is summarized by First and Mizell in the book, *Everybody's Business:*

> *The massive suspension of students throughout the nation for truancy, cutting class, excessive tardiness, and leaving campus without permission is not a responsible use of authority. Efforts by teachers to gain the power to summarily dismiss from their classes students whom they perceive as disruptive represent a departure from teachers' traditional responsibilities to deal with problems in their classroom, rather than remove them.*

Punishment is much more palatable if it is part of a larger strategy that also involves addressing problems that emanate from the school and the child. Critics find, however, that in cases where many children are excluded, it is often indicative that suspension is the main strategy employed to create order and that there is consequently considerable disorder. In these instances, children's needs are unmet and educators are perpetuating that fact by excluding children.

Critics are very pointed in their complaints about the need for suspension and, particularly, excessive reliance on this form of punishment. Those who defend its use typically acknowledge that it is a regretable intervention, and perhaps a stopgap measure (*Suspensions and Expulsion*, 1976), but one that school personnel need to have available for executing their responsibilities. They argue that it is a useful tool because: it protects the interest of the group, it is a way to get the attention of parents, it is not very costly in time or other scarce school resources, it is supportive of staff, there are few other options for punishing negative behavior, and exclusion is a teaching tool.

In addition to a basic aversion to exclusionary practices, critics also take issue with each of these justifications. Some of the arguments pro and con related to suspension and expulsion as necessary tools are offered here.

1) Protects the interests of the group vs. protects the interests of the individual

The most common argument in support of suspension is that students who misbehave interrupt the educational process and make it difficult for the other students in the classroom to learn. Proponents argue that suspension is necessary so the group can continue to pursue its educational activities. Teachers are acting on their responsibility to educate when they refer to the principal students who disrupt that activity.

Critics of suspension are also concerned about assuring that the educational process proceeds smoothly. They disagree that suspension helps. First, suspension may temporarily remove the disruptive child and give the classroom a moment of relief. Proponents and critics agree that exclusion does not solve problems that cause misbehavior. Therefore, when the disruptive child returns to class there is little chance that the classroom will be any more harmonious. Critics argue that just the opposite may occur. Exclusion increases a child's problems. By putting the child behind academically, making the child feel alienated and rejected (*School Suspensions*, 1975), it makes the child even more inclined to misbehave.

Critics also question whether suspension is really necessary to protect the interests of the group. Teachers refer students to the principal when they feel unable or unwill-

ing to deal with the student's behavior. The severity of the behavior that is referred varies, depending on the teacher's skills and desire to resolve problems and building level norms. While most students are referred by teachers for behavior that may be disruptive to some degree, many behaviors that are punished by suspension should be addressed and could be more effectively resolved by the classroom teacher, making suspension unnecessary.

Critics of suspension disagree with the view that suspension is needed in order to protect the group for a third reason. They say this rationale suggests that some children are worthy of education and others are not. The basic premise of public education is that all children are guaranteed access to schooling, and educators are responsible for serving all children. Exclusionary discipline practices directly contradict the need to educate all children. Educators are in a very difficult position because they must balance the interests of both the group and the individual. Critics argue that only under unusual circumstances should that trade-off deny an individual access to education. Some other strategy is needed that does not interfere with the primary responsibility to serve all children.

Finally, critics complain that the classroom may not have to cope with this child, but the community does. Many suspended or expelled children are out of school where there is a chance to address their needs, and on the streets. These children are often unsupervised, bored and alienated. Escalated misbehavior on the streets is one result.

2) Gains attention of parents vs. alienates the child and family

Supporters argue that because suspension is a serious step, it catches the attention of parents. Frequently, one prerequisite for ending a suspension is for the child to bring a parent to school.

Critics disagree with this justification for suspension. They do not disagree about the value of parent involvement in problem solving. However, obtaining parental attention via suspension suggests that parents do not care and can only be reached by severe sanctions. Critics argue that parents do care and less dramatic steps can lead to parent involvement. If school personnel feel suspension is needed to gain the parent's attention, this is symptomatic of a school-based problem—that the school lacks community trust. If there is that little support, then drastic and positive activities which build community support are needed. Suspension tends to be counter-productive to this strategy.

Critics also argue that some parents will not become involved, especially when the school is critical of their child. This is no reason to further penalize the child.

3) Convenient vs. effective

Another major element in this controversy is the convenience factor. Proponents find it a desirable response because it is a noticeable punishment, can be given swiftly and clearly, but is not costly to the school. No special program or staff time beyond the notification process is needed. In fact, many principals explain that they use suspension when many children are referred to them and they lack time to give much individual attention. Suspension allows them to intervene quickly.

It is just this convenience that makes some people critical. As one parent group observed in a document outlining concern about suspension, "expedience rather than fairness or effectiveness characterize discipline practices" (*Suspended Students—Suspended Learning*, 1982). This applies to administrators and teachers who make referrals for suspension. On a similar note, a researcher on this issue observed:

> *Because of their frustrations teachers easily fall into the trap of using suspension as an expedient response to a problem that they do not want to or are unable to handle. (Garibaldi, Ed., 1979)*

Critics are particularly concerned about this intervention because it fails to solve problems. They charge that adults abdicate their responsibility to address real issues. Furthermore, critics are concerned because it communicates to students that they and their needs are not important. As the Parent's Union observed, overuse of suspension sends the message, "We'll suspend you to get you out of our hair so we don't have to deal with your troublesome behavior," (*Suspended Students—Suspended Learning*, 1982).

4) Supportive of staff vs. serving needs of youth

Student behavior is primarily the responsibility of the classroom teacher. One tool available to the teacher is to send a misbehaving student to the principal. The principal must then decide what to do. The way a principal handles discipline has a major effect on teacher-administrator relations. According to one education writer, the teacher looks to the principal for back up and protection of self-esteem. Suspension is thus a response from which the principal can gain teacher support (Harwood, 1969).

Critics feel that the main effect of suspension is that it proves that adults have power over children. This is hardly a sufficient reason to use suspension or expulsion. It also transmits a negative message about fairness in a public institution and contradicts the basic responsibility that educators have to serve and educate, not control, youth.

5) Few other options vs. too narrow a search for solutions

Another argument offered in favor of suspension is that it is necessary because there are few other options available for punishing students. In some instances limitation on the use of corporal punishment is offered as the explanation for suspension (*The Student Pushout*, 1973), and in others it is the lack of resources for less restrictive responses such as in-school suspensions.

Those who disagree with the use of suspension often argue that the lack of options only occurs when children are sent to the principal to resolve behavior problems. The remedy is to reduce referrals, not to use a response that principals often feel is their only choice because they lack the time to work with individuals. Critics argue that classroom teachers should be encouraged to exercise their traditional responsibility for working with students, and use the wide array of options they have to gain the child's attention and make the child accountable. This is the best way to reduce the need for exclusionary responses.

Furthermore, if suspension is used frequently for nonthreatening behavior, then many other options that are more appropriate to the behavior and might change behavior are available.

Critics also argue that a punishment orientation is too narrow an approach to take when dealing with misbehav-

ior. Misbehavior has complex causes and reflects a variety of personal, societal, and school-based problems (*Everybody's Business* includes an excellent description of the complexity of causes associated with student behavior). Consequently, discipline problems do not lend themselves to quick solutions such as suspension. They require a broad and thoughtful approach. This view is expressed by Hayes Mizell:

> *. . . the essential characteristic that is responsible for 'good discipline' in schools is people who care enough about the school and the students to take extraordinary actions to realize the potential of both. (1981)*

Attention to school climate issues, community involvement, and instructional excellence are frequent alternatives offered by those who find punishment too narrow. Student advocates and education researchers looking for alternatives to suspension often examine schools with high and low suspension rates in their search for solutions. A common finding is that administrative efforts and school climate variables have the greatest effect on the dependency and necessity of using suspension. The Parent's Union observed in *Suspended Students—Suspended Learning:*

> *The triple combination of community involvement, school emphasis on instruction rather than control, and a student-centered environment were characteristics of schools with low suspension rates.*

Similarly, a study of schools with high and low suspension rates in Jefferson County, Kentucky, revealed that "school climate emerged as the critical element in the differentation of low and high suspension schools" (Bickel and Qualls, 1980). According to that study, the main contribution to school climate was administrator behavior. Administrators in the low suspension rate schools paid attention to human relations, were visible, and had a positive influence on the morale of the staff and students. This broad set of strategies reduced the need for suspension by preventing problems and making more alternatives rewarding.

A third study which focused on schools with low suspension rates revealed several characteristics common to these schools. The two most common were: 1) that the schools work to insure high levels of teacher performance, and 2) that they find ways to translate the idea of a child-centered institution into reality (Kaeser, 1979). These efforts resulted in motivated teachers, a strong educational program, high expectations for student performance, educators who were willing and able to work with parents, and consistent and constructive responses to student behavior. In these schools the discipline strategy was not seen as something separate from the strategy to create a high quality educational environment. This approach diminished a focus on punitive dimensions of discipline and removed any sense that few options existed for creating orderly schools.

6) Suspension teaches vs. it teaches the wrong lessons

Many explanations for suspension stem from a belief that exclusion teaches a variety of lessons. Some benefits are that it provides a hiatus during which more appropriate conduct can be taught, it can teach the child that his/her behavior is serious, and it can teach other students that certain types of misbehavior are not acceptable and thereby may deter others from misbehaving (*Suspension and Expulsion,* 1976).

Critics feel that any of these lessons can be accomplished in some other way that does not require exclusion. Furthermore, critics question if any real teaching about better behavior ever accompanies exclusion. For the most part, they argue, it teaches negative lessons about adult use of power.

The reliance on "setting an example" as a way to impress upon youth that certain behavior is not acceptable suggests to critics that some educators feel unable to work with children in a constructive way to achieve their desired goals. This adult problem does not justify denying student access to education.

Finally, critics tend to focus on those situations where large numbers of students are excluded or certain children are repeatedly excluded. They argue that suspension loses its effect if used too easily or frequently, and that it communicates that school is not important (*Suspended Students—Suspended Learning,* 1982).

Alternatives to Suspension

The controversy about suspension raises the issue of alternatives. Those demanding change in the use of suspension have found it strategically important to offer alternatives. Furthermore, because critics of suspension are not just concerned about this specific form of punishment but have a larger view of the task of creating orderly schools, the discussion of alternatives is one way to pursue this larger picture. They identify the objectives and criteria for alternative school activities designed to create order and document school practices that conform with those views. Educators and education researchers have also focused on alternatives.

This concern has resulted in a variety of materials that document and describe a wide range of school practices that contribute to orderly schools and minimize the use of disciplinary exclusion.[1] In addition to written materials, groups including the National Institute of Education and the Secondary School Principals Association have held conferences and provided training to school personnel on creative approaches to school discipline. Much of this activity is a direct response to the criticism of school suspension.

A wide range of alternatives are available for addressing school discipline problems. Some of the alternatives are limited to punishment and strategies to control students without excluding them from the school building. These include traditional but less extreme punishments: detention centers, in-school study centers, and in-school suspension centers (Williams, 1979; Wayson and Pinnell, 1978).

Many of the options go beyond punishment and involve

[1]Some of the materials include the *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin,* which often features articles about innovative school discipline practices; the National Education Association's book, *Classroom Discipline: Case Studies and Viewpoints;* the National Institute of Education's *Directory of In-School Alternatives to Out-of-School Suspension;* the National School Public Relations Association publication, *Suspension and Expulsion;* The Phi Delta Kappa Commission on School Discipline, *Handbook;* Citizens' Council for Ohio Schools, *Orderly Schools That Serve All Children;* First and Mizell, *Everybody's Business.* Full citations can be found in the bibliography.

a variety of techniques for identifying problems or unmet needs that result in negative behavior, and for finding solutions. These include counseling, resource utilization strategies, and behavior modification strategies. Other alternatives include finding ways to improve communication between the school and home, reduce alienation, develop skills of school personnel and students, and modify school rules. Alternative schooling is yet another option. Finally, a variety of options address ways of assessing the school climate to identify school-based sources of behavior problems, and remedying those problems (First and Mizell, 1980; and Kaeser, 1979).

Perhaps the most popular response that school personnel offer to criticism of school suspension is in-school suspension. In-school suspension refers to a wide range of programs designed to serve a variety of purposes. They include the "slammer" concept which isolates the student in an uncomfortable setting without educational materials or any activity or program. At the other extreme is the problem-solving time-out model where the student is isolated from the rest of the school but involved in academic work, problem identification activities, counseling, and problem solving. There are many options that fall between these extremes. They vary in the extent to which they are designed to change behavior by being a severe punishment, or to change behavior by solving problems.

For many this is seen as a panacea for the "suspension problem" (Mendez and Sanders, 1981). However, the in-school suspension approach is questioned in terms of its effectiveness and the degree to which it improves on the out-of-school suspension model. As one critic stated the concern:

> *. . . just because a disciplinary practice carries the label of an in-school alternative to suspension, it cannot be assumed that the needs of children are being better served or that it represents a qualitative improvement over previous disciplinary practices. (Mizell, 1981)*

The most frequently criticized alternatives are those designed only to keep students off the street. These options and others with limited purposes and program elements have many of the problems that are common to out-of-school suspension: instructional time is lost, underlying problems go unaddressed, children can be labeled, participation can be discouraged, absenteeism is increased, alientation is increased, and minority or low-income children can be disproportionately punished (Mizell, 1981).

Critics also suggest that some in-school options, if not conceived to better serve children's needs, could be more harmful than what they are replacing. For example, if alternatives are perceived to be less odious than out of school suspension, some personnel may be inclined to use them more frequently and without assuring proper procedural protections (Lufler, 1979), and the use may go without monitoring, record keeping, or scrutiny. This creates the potential for many problems. Two practitioners note:

> *In-school suspension programs can be viable, beneficial tools in the secondary education process if they give equal attention to rehabilitation and to order and control. If considered as merely administrative conveniences and strictly disciplinary innovations, they will probably provide no educational benefits and may possibly have an overall negative effect in the areas they were established to enhance. (Mendez and Sanders, 1981)*

Those who scrutinize in-school options also acknowledge that some models can be useful interventions if they are designed to better serve children, are based on a philosophical perspective that sees a broad set of responsibilities for school personnel with regard to discipline, and look beyond punishment to solve problems. This support for in-school alternatives, however, is qualified. Critics warn that these activities, when properly designed, can be valuable as a step toward better meeting students' needs, but "they must not be allowed to deter or replace more fundamental educational efforts which will prevent the kinds of behavior to which in-school alternatives are a response" (Mizell, 1979).

The most productive in-school suspension programs are designed to help the child, help the school better meet the child's needs, identify and remedy root problems, help the child develop self-discipline, identify factors that contribute to discipline problems, and stimulate preventive measures to reduce these problems. This must occur without significant interruption of the instructional process.

Those who scrutinize in-school alternatives also suggest a variety of issues which designers should consider when developing and implementing alternatives so that they will have maximum positive effects. Williams (1979), for example, poses six questions that designers should consider prior to developing a program. The answers to these questions will affect just how effective and supportive the programs will be. Those questions are: What purpose will the alternative serve? How does the in-school alternative implicitly or explicitly define the source(s) of the problem it will address? How will the effectiveness of the in-school alternative be assessed? Does the alternative permit and support the student in maintaining academic progress substantially equivalent to the regular school program? How will the alternative program address the behavior problem(s) (both structural and student-centered) leading to students' assignment there? What legal issues might arise in the operation of an in-school alternative?

The operational design of an in-school alternative must also be carefully crafted. Some of the issues that receive special attention are the criteria and procedures for referral, facilities design, selection of staff and delineation of responsibilities, communication to all staff about the need and purpose of the program, program elements that include dialogue with parents, quality instruction, counseling, access to support services, and follow-up activities (First and Mizell, 1980).

The criticism of suspension and the concern for the proper design of alternatives are expressions of the critics' philosophical views of how to treat children fairly, hold children accountable, create order in schools, and the educator's role in each of those activities. Some of the common concerns about what appropriate interventions should do are listed here. They reflect a philosophical view of the best way to go about solving these problems. Critics of suspension and expulsion usually advocate school actions that:

1. Are educationally sound.
2. Have positive learning outcomes, not just compliant behavior.

3. Preserve the dignity and personal integrity of the students.
4. Avoid aggravating problems of troubled kids.
5. Contribute to positive school climate and do not undermine school-community relations or school-student relations.
6. Identify root problems which underlie symptomatic behavior. This includes problems with the child and the school environment.
7. Help youngsters develop self-discipline.
8. Maintain the instructional process.
9. Are purposeful and fit the behavior.
10. Protect the child's legal rights.
11. Are fair and employed in such a way that they transmit a sense of confidence in the adults who are responsible for schools and illustrate that authority and power can be used constructively.

Suspension and Expulsion in Ohio

Legal Issues

Following the *Goss* decision, the Ohio General Assembly revised Ohio law to assure that the state regulations governing the use of disciplinary exclusion conformed with the Constitution. Three exclusionary practices are addressed in the 1976 law: suspension, expulsion and emergency removal. The law specifies the duration of each punishment, who has authority to invoke each punishment, and the due process requirement which must be followed to protect the students' interests.

First, a suspension may not exceed ten school days and expulsion is for a period longer than ten days. In either case, the period of exclusion may not go beyond the semester during which the infraction occurred.

Second, only the superintendent of schools may expel a student while a superintendent or principal may suspend. In the case of emergency removal, the superintendent, principal, or assistant principal may remove a student from curricular or extracurricular activities, or from the school. A teacher may remove a pupil from activities under his/her supervision, but not from the school.

Third, school authorities must give students proper notice and a hearing when suspension and expulsion are anticipated. Prior to suspending a student, the student must receive written notice of the intention to suspend and the reason. The student must also be given an opportunity to appear at an informal hearing to challenge the reasons for the intended suspension and to explain his/her actions. In the case of expulsion, both the student and that child's parent or guardian must be given written notice by the superintendent of the intention to expel and for what reason, and the time and place for a hearing with the superintendent. The student or his parent or representative may request changes in the hearing time. A hearing is then held before the superintendent or his/her representative (Jollay, 1981).

In the case of an emergency removal, the notice and hearing requirements are temporarily waived if the pupil's presence "poses a continuing danger to persons or property or an on-going threat of disrupting the academic process . . ." (Section 3313.6 (C) O.R.C.). A hearing must be held as soon as possible but within 72 hours of the removal. The same procedures for the suspension and expulsion then apply, depending on which punishment is likely to occur. The person who ordered the removal must be present at the hearing.

Fourth, school personnel must notify the student and that child's parent or guardian of any decision to suspend or expel following the proper hearing. This notice must be written, and must inform the recipient about the reason for the suspension or expulsion, the right to appeal the decision and to be represented at the appeal, and to whom an appeal can be made.

In addition to outlining procedural requirements for excluding students, the law requires that each board of education in Ohio adopt a code that specifies all types of misconduct for which a pupil could be punished using an exclusionary practice. It also calls for districts to post and distribute the code.

While state law establishes the basic ground rules for the procedures school personnel must follow, local personnel also have a role. In addition to adopting a code of discipline as mandated by law, local boards of education must establish the exact procedures for excluding students that comply with state law. Most codes of conduct establish which violations may result in exclusion but do not prescribe this response.

Building level personnel are responsible for assuring order in their buildings and for implementing policy. They have great discretion about how to approach the goal of creating an orderly environment and how to respond to students who misbehave, as long as they do not violate local policy. They are critical actors in the issues of school discipline and the use of disciplinary exclusion.

The Data on Suspension and Expulsion in Ohio

Every two years the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) of the United States Department of Education conducts the *Elementary and Secondary School Survey*. A sample of school districts in each state is asked to complete questionnaires covering a number of topics. This survey, which is conducted to help the Department enforce the various federal laws which bar discrimination related to race, sex and handicap, provides the only centrally collected data on school discipline practices.

School districts selected for inclusion in the OCR School Survey are asked to report by race the number of students in the district expelled during the school year, and the number of students in each building suspended at least once (this includes in-school suspension).

Based on these data, OCR calculates for each district suspension and expulsion rates for all students and for students by racial category. The rate in each case is the total number of students affected at least once by the punishment, divided by the district-wide enrollment. OCR also calculates, based on the sample data, a projected average expulsion and suspension rate for each state and the nation.

The Council reviewed and analyzed 1980 survey data including the aggregated data for Ohio and the nation, the district level data for the 253 Ohio districts surveyed that year, and building level data for 304 secondary schools in a subsample of 61 school districts (Kaeser, 1984). The Council also reviewed suspension rates by race for school districts with substantial minority enrollment. This was limited to those districts where any individual minority group accounted for between 5 and 95% of the enrollment. This

included 57 districts of which 44 had substantial black enrollment, 10 had substantial Hispanic enrollment, and three had both black and Hispanic enrollment that fell in this range. None of the 253 districts surveyed had Asian or American Indian enrollments that accounted for more than 2.9% of the total student body.

Some of the statistical information from that analysis is included here. Table 1 reports the projected average data for Ohio and the nation by race for suspension and expulsion rates. The distribution of suspension and expulsion rates for the 253 Ohio districts in the sample are reported on Table 2. Table 3 lists the districts in the sample where suspension rates by race indicated disproportionate exclusion of minority students.

Some of the findings from this analysis are:

1. Expulsion is not used widely in Ohio schools or nationally. Half the Ohio districts in the survey expelled no students, and 80% expelled fewer than .4% of their students. The projected average expulsion rate in Ohio and nationally was .3% which means that about 6,800 children were expelled in Ohio during the 1979-80 school year.
2. The decile of districts with the highest expulsion rates are those with rates of .4% to 1.8%. While many of these high expulsion rate districts have rates that are less than 2.0%, the rarity of expulsion in most districts makes these apparently low rates problematic. Nine districts expelled more than 1% of their students.
3. About 6.1% of the students in Ohio were suspended during 1979-80, or 122,000 students. School personnel in Ohio suspend a larger proportion of their students than is the case in the nation: 6.1% compared to 5.4%.
4. Suspension is used in almost every school district; however, there is considerable diversity in district level use of this punishment. District level rates range between zero and 22.3%.
5. District level rates tend to be lower than the 6.1% state average. About half the sample districts had rates of 4.0% or less, and 70% had rates lower than the state average. At the same time, about 30% of the districts suspended larger proportions of their students than the state average.
6. The decile of districts surveyed with the very highest rates are those with rates between 9.5% and 22.3%. These are clearly problematic districts in light of what is common in Ohio districts.
7. Building level data indicate that suspension is used primarily to punish students in secondary schools. When the data for all secondary buildings in a subsample of 61 districts were combined, 90% of the students suspended at least once in these districts were in secondary school.
8. In most school districts, suspending elementary students is unusual, and often associated with above average suspension rates. Nine of the 12 districts where 10% or more of the suspended students were in elementary school had above average suspension rates.
9. Not only is there considerable diversity in the use of suspension among the 253 Ohio school districts included in this survey, but there is considerable diver-

TABLE 1

OCR Projected Average Suspension and Expulsion Rates by Race for Ohio and the United States — 1979-80 School Year[1]

	Students Expelled As % of All Students Enrolled		Students Suspended At Least Once As a % of All Students Enrolled	
	Nation	Ohio	Nation	Ohio
Total	.35%	.34%	5.35%	6.12%
White	.33%	.31%	4.52%	5.13%
Black	.42%	.52%	9.86%	12.79%
Hispanic	.42%	.29%	4.85%	6.30%

[1]Sources: National data on suspensions and expulsions are from: *1980 Elementary and Secondary School, National Summary, September, 1982*, Office for Civil Rights.

Ohio averages are from: *1980 Elementary and Secondary School Survey, State Summaries, Vol. I, March 1982*, Office for Civil Rights, Tab A.

TABLE 2

A. Distribution of Expulsion Rates for Ohio School Districts in the 1980 OCR School Survey— 1979-80 School Year

Expulsion Rate	No. Districts	% of All Districts
.1% or less	157	66.5%
.11 to .20	20	8.5%
.21 to .30	22	9.3%
.31 to .40	10	4.2%
.41 to .50	7	3.0%
.51 to 1.00	11	4.7%
1.01 plus	9	3.8%
Total *	236	100.0%

B. Distribution of Suspension Rates for Ohio School Districts in the 1980 OCR School Survey— 1979-80 School Year

Suspension Rate Interval	No. Districts with Rate in Interval	% of Districts in Sample with Rates in Interval	Cumulative %
0	5	2.0%	2.0%
.1- 2.0%	58	22.9%	24.9%
2.1- 4.0%	68	26.9%	51.8%
4.1- 6.0%	49	19.4%	71.1%
6.1- 8.0%	32	12.6%	83.7%
8.1-10.0%	22	8.7%	92.4%
10.1-12.0%	10	4.0%	96.4%
12.1-14.0%	5	2.0%	98.4%
14.1+	4	1.6%	100.0%
Total	253	100.1%	

*Expulsion data were not available for 17 districts.

sity in its use among individual buildings. Building level rates ranged from zero to 80% in this analysis of secondary school rates. Furthermore, a comparison of secondary school suspension rates for buildings in the 18 districts in the sub-sample with at least four secondary buildings indicated little uniformity among buildings within school districts.

10. Building level rates for urban versus non-urban districts, indicate that high rates at the building level are found in all types of districts but are more common in the urban districts. The reverse is true for low rates.

11. The data on suspension rates by race indicate that black and Hispanic students are suspended at higher rates than their white peers in almost every school district in the sample. While both minority groups tend to be excluded at higher rates than their white peers, the amount of difference is higher than average in 15 of the 47 districts with substantial black enrollment and eight of the 13 districts with substantial Hispanic enrollment. Of these districts there are 14 with substantial black enrollment and five with substantial Hispanic enrollment that have above average suspension rates, and the difference in rates by race is greater than the difference of rates nationally. Efforts to remove any doubts about fair treatment of all children should focus on these districts.

TABLE 3

Districts With Above Average Differences in Suspension Rates by Race

A. Districts with 5-95% Black Enrollment

District	Suspension Rate For: All Students	Black Students	White Students	Difference Between Black and White Rates
Alliance	9.8%	20.3%	7.7%	12.6%
Warren	16.3%	24.6%	12.8%	11.8%
Cleveland Hts/ University Hts	7.9%	13.2%	4.0%	9.2%
Middletown	8.9%	16.8%	7.8%	9.0%
Cincinnati	12.8%	16.3%	8.2%	8.1%
Maple Heights	11.4%	18.8%	11.0%	7.8%
Copley**	6.8%	14.0%	6.5%	7.5%
Steubenville	9.4%	14.4%	7.1%	7.3%
Princeton	11.8%	16.2%	9.5%	6.7%
Northwest Local**	7.1%	12.9%	6.7%	6.2%
Bedford	12.8%	17.7%	11.5%	6.2%
Lorain	7.3%	11.1%	5.1%	6.0%
Toledo	7.0%	10.9%	5.0%	5.9%
Xenia	8.6%	13.5%	7.9%	5.6%
Troy*	4.4%	11.3%	4.0%	7.3%

B. Districts with 5-95% Hispanic Enrollment

District	Suspension Rate For: All Students	Hispanic Students	White Students	Difference Between Hispanic and White Rates
Napoleon	7.3%	12.5%	6.5%	6.0%
Gibonsburg	7.0%	11.8%	6.4%	5.4%
Lorain	7.3%	10.4%	5.1%	5.3%
Fremont	8.6%	11.4%	7.9%	3.5%
Pike-Delta-York*	4.3%	8.9%	4.1%	4.8%
Campbell*	3.5%	6.6%	2.6%	4.0%
Patrick Henry*	4.6%	5.5%	4.5%	1.0%

*These districts have significant differences in rates by race, but below average total suspension rates so problems are less serious.

**Northwest Local is in Hamilton County and Copley is Copley-Fairlawn.

The Citizens' Council's Position on Suspension and Expulsion

Expulsion and suspension are two punishments that school personnel may use when children misbehave. These specific punishments are important to the Citizens' Council for Ohio Schools because they relate to issues of participation, access, educational effectiveness, and school discipline. The Council's views on suspension and expulsion, and related issues are summarized here:

1. Suspension and expulsion are two school practices that interrupt student participation and access to instruction. While often justified in order to assure an orderly environment for other students, the fact that these practices deprive the excluded student of access to instruction means they must be used with great care, avoided wherever possible, and scrutinized regularly.
2. The Council is very aware that the challenges of creating an orderly learning environment and serving all children are not easy tasks. The Council believes, however, that these are paramount tasks and how well they are achieved is one measure of a school's effectiveness.
3. Educators have convinced us that citizens are not wrong to expect educators to create orderly schools without excluding the children they are responsible for serving. This task is not achieved by simplistic responses, or heavy reliance on punishment. It requires painstaking attention to the details of running a school, developing community support, and delivering a focused and purposeful educational program.

   Some attitudes and related behavior that make it possible for educators to succeed at fulfilling their responsibilities to educate all children in an orderly environment are:

   A. Educators do not view discipline as separate from, irrelevant or contradictory to education. Both tasks are important and related.
   B. Educators understand that professional competence is not limited to subject matter knowledge or pedagogical style, but includes skills for working with all types of children in support of their total development.
   C. Educators are trained in the skills related to teaching self-discipline.
   D. Educators believe that discipline can be taught and devote attention to that outcome.
   E. School staffs give explicit attention to the rules and consequences of violating them in order to minimize subjectivity and promote a consistent system.
   F. Educators do not rely on punishment as the way to create order. Staff members understand that attention to the school structure, educator morale, purposeful educational activity, community contact, and communicating high expectations for the ability and behavior of adults and children in the school are part of a total strategy that is needed to create order.
   G. Punishment, when used, is designed to help children learn and does not belittle children or interfere with instruction; the purpose for its use is clearly understood by the child and the educators.
4. Educators can misuse their authority by relying too heavily on suspension or expulsion as a response to student behavior, or by applying these punishments differently to different groups of children.

   Unfair application of these costly forms of punishment can contribute to disorder. It can undermine parent support for the school, staff effort, and student behavior. It also teaches a negative lesson to students about the use of authority. Therefore, these punishments must be used with special care to assure that the system is fair.
5. The Council believes that suspension and expulsion are most appropriately used and their use is most likely to be perceived as fair under the following conditions: they are reserved for student behavior that is illegal or clearly threatening to the safety and security of others; those reasons are spelled out and understood by students, faculty and parents; a process is followed which reduces subjectivity, and guarantees impartiality in the enforcement of rules and assigning of the consequences; and punishment is part of a larger strategy to create order. Compliance with rules is the most widespread when students and parents participate in their formulation.

   A fair system is undermined when exclusion is used for minor misbehavior, or is motivated by inappropriate reasons such as to set an example, attract the attention of parents, or because of frustration or the lack of time or energy to address the real problem. Problems also occur when staff members do not agree about what should be punished by exclusion or rely heavily on administrators to address discipline problems.
6. To the extent that data are indicative of misuse of suspension or expulsion, our review of statistical information suggests:

   A. Misuse of expulsion by over-use or differential treatment by race is not a widespread problem in Ohio. Some school districts expel students for truancy, which is the main explanation for high rates and appears to be the major source of misuse. Some districts expel students for trivial but chronic rule violations. This practice is a questionable use of expulsion which may or may not be easily detected in unusual expulsion rates.
   B. Suspension is much more frequently used and abused than expulsion. Efforts to assure fair discipline practices should focus on this problem, particularly in those districts and buildings where large proportions of students are suspended, or where the data indicate potential problems related to discrimination.
   C. Efforts to assure that suspension is not over-used

or does not affect certain groups more than others requires review and monitoring of building level data. District data are helpful for triggering concern for widespread problems, but they can mask building level conditions. Assuring appropriate use of suspension requires local efforts to monitor practices in every building in a school district, and to address building level practices when the data are problematic. At the building level, a focus on referral practices by individual teachers may be key to solving problems.

7. Concerned citizens, school board members, administrators and building personnel should regularly monitor the use of exclusionary discipline practices, and assess whether these punishments are used wisely and fairly and whether the data suggest school quality problems.

8. In-school alternatives to suspension have the same potential for misuse as out-of-school suspension and must be scrutinized in the same way. The most promising in-school alternatives escape the punitive and exclusionary dimensions of suspension, and are opportunities to focus school and community resources to address the needs of students who misbehave. They also learn from these students about school problems that need attention.

9. Student misbehavior has complex causes. Responses must reflect this fact. Some causes relate to the school itself. While it is appropriate for students to be held accountable for their behavior, the causes of problems mean that school personnel and the community must also be accountable. School improvement activities may be needed in cases where there is widespread misbehavior or widespread exclusion of students.

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CHAPTER III

Dropouts

Each year many school aged youth end their academic careers without completing the requirements for high school graduation. Most of these young people are in high school when they leave, but youth of all ages quit school. For many, this is the permanent end of their formal education. These early school leavers are commonly referred to as dropouts.

The dropout is an imprecise concept. When people talk about dropouts, they might be referring to the child who sits in the classroom but never participates. Others may be referring to the child who remains on the school roster, but only attends sporadically, if at all. Yet others may be referring to those children who have been formally withdrawn from the register of their school for any of a number of reasons. Others think of dropouts only as those students who leave school without positive alternatives.

While the process of dropping out often starts when the student is passive in the classroom or sporadic in attendance, for the purposes of this discussion the dropout is the person who is no longer enrolled in school. The dropout is a person who is eligible for public school enrollment, but for any of a wide range of reasons is not enrolled in an educational program that will lead to a high school diploma or an equivalent level of certification. These students include youth who leave school for legally permissible reasons, as well as those who just disappear despite compulsory attendance laws. This includes those youth who step out (temporarily leave school), and those for whom this decision terminates their formal schooling.

School Attendance in Ohio and The Law

Compulsory attendance laws add a legal dimension to dropping out. In Ohio, the laws assure students access to a free public education, and require participation in a program that conforms with state standards. The laws also assign school districts responsibility for assuring that all students conform to participation requirements.

Ohio law guarantees all residents who are at least five years old and under 22 access to a free public education and requires school enrollment for all youth from the ages of 6 to 18. A person who is younger than 6 or older than 18 is not required to attend school, nor is a person under 18 who has received a high school diploma. The law also outlines a few other reasons that exempt students from participation. There are two basic exemptions. One is the age and school certificate, which allows children who are at least 16 years of age to leave school for employment. The second is exemption if, in the judgement of the local superintendent, the child's "bodily or mental condition does not permit attendance at a school or special program." Home instruction is also a reason not to participate in a school program, if it meets certain requirements.

These legal requirements mean that except in a few cases, young people in Ohio should be enrolled in school and attending regularly. If a person stops attending for any other reason than those outlined in the law, it is a violation of the law, and that person or the child's parents are subject to legal prosecution.

Dropouts are students who are out of school for either legal or illegal reasons. Since dropouts in this report are young people who are eligible for service in school but are not pursuing a program that will lead to a high school diploma, it means that students who are legally exempt are dropouts, as are those who violate compulsory attendance laws. The chronic truant is not out of school for a legal reason. If the pattern of attendance indicates the student is not attending, at some point that person should be considered a dropout. In this discussion, that student is technically a truant, but clearly the problems and needs of the dropout are likely to apply to this person as well.

The Dropout Problem

Some young people who leave school feel this is a positive decision (Olsen et al., 1982; *Secondary School Dropouts*, 1981; *Special Report: The Dropout*, 1980). They may leave for a job or to enter a more rewarding educational experience. For many this is a chance to take control over their own destiny. It can mean escaping a negative experience. In some cases, plans for employment or further education materialize and the decision does not produce negative results. However, the opposite is also often the case. For example, according to a survey of Phoenix area dropouts who returned to school, their expectations for positive activities after leaving school were not met (*Special Report: The Dropout*, 1980). The report also noted that minority students were over-represented among youth returning to school, in part because racial discrimination in employment added to the negative effects of school leaving. The combined effect resulted in fewer opportunities for meaningful activity.

Regardless of how individuals view their decision to leave school or what options they have, the fact that school aged youth drop out of school is usually viewed as a problem. It is a problem for the individual who leaves, the community in which that person resides at the moment or later, and the schools that are charged with providing an education to the children of that community.

Much of the research and literature related to the dropout issue either documents the negative consequences of leaving school without a diploma (e.g., King, 1978; Levin, 1972; Bachman, et al., 1972), or is motivated by these negative consequences (e.g., *Report of Governor's Study Committee*, 1981; *Secondary School Dropouts*, 1981; Novak and Dougherty, 1979; Nachman, 1963).

Much of the literature focuses on the opportunities available to high school graduates compared to dropouts. The most frequently noted negative consequences for the individual leaving school without a diploma are those re-

lated to employment. The statement of one researcher reflects this commonly held concern:

> *Young people who drop out of school face a grim future. They have prematurely curtailed one of the most important mechanisms for achieving success in the labor market—their education. (Rumberger, 1981)*

Dropping out can affect immediate access to employment or access to further education which can have employment benefits.

The job related problems include the ability to locate a job, possibilities for advancement, immediate and long-term earnings, and job satisfaction. In each case, there is evidence that the dropout has fewer positive outcomes in each area than the peer who completes school. The exact cause of this outcome is not clear. In fact, some argue it is not the lack of skills that is the problem, but an unnecessarily high credential oriented labor market (Miller, 1964). Others argue that the job consequences are less a function of dropping out than the problems that resulted in dropping out (Bachman et al., 1972).

Other personal costs of dropping out that are frequently noted in the literature are a diminished sense of worth and power, less personal satisfaction about life and the quality of life available, and increased health problems. The dropout tends to have more problems and fewer opportunities for healthy and productive lives than their peers (*Report of Governor's Study Committee*, 1981; Cohen, 1981; Novak and Dougherty, 1979; Levin, 1972). Finally, many dropouts experience a stigma, and "admit to a nagging sense of failure—failure to stay in school the way 'most kids do'" (Olsen et al., 1982).

There are a number of costs to society that are also frequently tabulated or noted as examples of why leaving school is a problem. Lost earnings, reduced productivity, lost government revenue and increased public costs from welfare, crime, and health problems are common social costs associated with youth who drop out. As one noted researcher testified at a Congressional hearing on inadequate education,

> *An inadequate education for a substantial portion of the population not only handicaps those persons who are under-educated, but also burdens society with reduced national income and governmental revenues, as well as increased costs of crime and welfare. (Levin, 1972)*

The dropout who has fewer options for meaningful economic participation also tends to have a higher incidence of alienation, suffer certain negative psychological effects, is less politically involved, and is less likely to be upwardly mobile. These unquantifiable costs to the individual and society are also noted in the discussion of why this is a problem (Wehlage et al., 1980; Novak and Dougherty, 1979).

Concern for the dropout as a social problem is also based on the fact that many people who exhibit unhealthy or anti-social behavior are dropouts. Not all dropouts are involved in crime, delinquent acts, or drug use, but a large share of people involved in these behaviors are dropouts (*Secondary School Dropouts*, 1981; *Report of Governor's Study Committee*, 1981). This increases the perception of the dropout decision as a social problem. Furthermore, much of the initiative for addressing dropout problems comes from those interested in solving delinquency, youth employment, and drug problems (e.g., Gottfredson, 1981; *Secondary School Dropouts*, 1981; Novak and Dougherty, 1979).

The limitations for a meaningful and productive life that seem to be associated with leaving school without a diploma mean that this is an issue for those who care about the well-being of the individual as well as the society. It means that the problem is often viewed as a social problem (Quay and Allen, 1982; *Report of Governor's Study Committee*, 1981; Schreiber, 1967; Nachman, 1964) and receives attention from child advocates, education reformers, economists and those involved in juvenile justice, youth employment, social services, welfare, and economic development.

While much of the attention that is focused on the dropout issue has come from its depiction as a significant social problem, it is also an education issue. It is an education decision which results in the premature end of the individual's education. This reflects on the ability of the schools to execute a widely held expectation of public schools to educate all youth through high school.

The decision to leave school is complex. In most cases, the school experience contributes to this decision. Therefore, to the extent that school policies and practices affect this decision it is an education problem (Wehlage et al., 1980; Neill, 1975; *Children Out of School*, 1974).

The fact that many schools have difficulty serving all children means that there are unequal benefits from this public resource. This makes the dropout issue an education equity issue (Felice, 1981; Wehlage et al., 1980, *Children Out of School*, 1974). Certain racial groups and language minority students are over-represented among the young people who drop out. This increases the significance of the issue as an educational equity issue (Steinberg et al., 1984; *Secondary School Dropouts*, 1981; Neill, 1975).

Finally, whether interest in the dropout problem stems from the social consequences of having inadequately educated youth, a commitment to public schooling for all youth, or an educational equity concern, the solution appears to be the same: find ways for schools to retain a larger share of those children who are eligible for service. Therefore, the schools are implicated in the issue as part of the solution.

History of the Problem

Dropping out of school has not always been viewed as a problem. Between the turn of the century and the Second World War, leaving school before graduation was the norm, and it did not generate significant negative consequences. At the turn of the century, for example, only 11 percent of all 14 to 17 year olds were enrolled in high school (Rumberger, 1981) and 10 percent of those who made it to high school graduated (Hunt and Clawson, 1975). Not only did most young people leave school without a high school diploma, but a high school education was not required by law, was not economically feasible for most, was not provided for in school budgets, and was not required for access to most jobs. Leaving school without a diploma did not limit options. Except for social reformers who thought all social problems would be solved if all people were educated, more education was not seen as necessary, and leav-

ing school without a diploma was not perceived to be the source of social or community problems.

Between 1900 and the Second World War, economic changes made it possible for more youth to spend more time in school. School participation, school budgets, the legal requirements for participation and the school's capacity to enforce them all increased (Tyack, 1976). By 1950, about 68 percent of the 17 year olds were enrolled in school (Rumberger, 1981). While participation increased during this period and concern for universal participation increased, in large part options for adult roles were not closed by failure to obtain a high school diploma.

The dropout issue gained increased significance as a social problem in the post- World War II period when technological changes affected employment options and training requirements (Schreiber, 1967). As a result, unskilled jobs became scarce so that the young person leaving school without a diploma no longer had easy access to employment. Furthermore, more technical jobs required more skilled workers which meant that education affected productivity. This change increased the importance of education as a basis for employment. Finally, high unemployment and a competitive job situation made credentials such as a diploma more important as a basis for hiring decisions.

Slowly, during the second half of this century, the school and school completion have taken on new significance in the society, in large part due to changes in the economy. The end result of these changes is that the high school has taken on a new role. This role is stated in one dropout research report:

> *The American high school has been given the mandate to provide youth with the credentials and skills necessary for participation in occupational and other social roles. The high school diploma is symbolic of completion of a major "rite of passage" into adulthood. School is seen by most adults as a necessary step in the conventional route to upward mobility. It is seen as the institution through which youth must pass in order to make the transition to a productive and satisfying adulthood. (Wehlage, Stone and Kliebard, 1980)*

This relatively new role for the high school and significance of the diploma as a credential for access to adult roles means that the person's decision to leave school without a diploma is likely to lead to problems. These problems affect the individual and have social implications.

An irony of this situation is that in contrast with the first half of this century when most young people did not stay in school because they could not afford to, now young people cannot afford to leave school. It is this change that has given the decision to leave school without a diploma its identity as a serious problem today, despite a vast increase in school retention since the turn of the century.

Counting Dropouts

Statistical information about the dropout is widely viewed as valuable, and information is frequently sought on the problem at the national, state, and local levels. Although the information is desirable, there is considerable variation in the data that are collected. The sources of data, what is measured, and the methods used all differ. This means that there is limited data on this topic, there are limits to its comparability, and the user must be especially careful when drawing on the data that are collected.

There are two basic types of data. First, there is that information which is collected from individuals, using some type of survey. Some important surveys related to this issue include the U.S. Census which tries to find all people, and various sample surveys.

School district records are a second source of information. Compulsory attendance laws require schools to assure that all students participate. The records on attendance and withdrawals are often used as the base for identifying how many students drop out.

Not only are there different sources of data, but they measure different things. Most of the national census data, for example, do not measure dropouts per se nor provide a dropout rate. The Census usually provides information on the proportion of people of school age who are enrolled, or the educational attainment of certain people. Much can be learned about school participation from these data, but it is not the same as a dropout report.

Most of the data specifically designed to report on dropouts comes from state or local school district efforts to collect this information from school personnel. States or local districts define the dropout, and then proceed to identify from school records how many students fit the definition.

There are several variations in this type of data which inhibit comparability and the accuracy in many cases. First, not every state collects this type of data. This makes it impossible to use this data to assemble national data, or to quantify the issue in every state. Second, state education agencies which collect this data often use different definitions, further inhibiting state by state comparison (Wacker, 1981). Third, state education agencies depend on local districts to provide them with data. Local districts not only vary in the accuracy of data they keep, but often are not consistent in how they interpret which categories of out-of-school youth fit the state's definition (Kaeser and Hooper, 1982; *Report on School Leaving Study*, 1982; Wacker, 1981; *Procedures Used in Computing Dropout Rates*, 1979). This can weaken state level data or even district level data when building personnel have similar disagreements. The lack of consistency has stimulated several state efforts to improve the data they collect by clarifying the definition, specifying which "withdrawal" categories or other sources of information about out of school youth fit the definition, and training school personnel to complete the forms (Cohen, 1981; Wacker, 1981).

Finally, the state or local data that are collected on dropouts often use different methods for counting dropouts. There are two common methods of collecting and expressing dropout data. The first method is an incidence count for a given school year. This method counts the number of students who leave school in a certain school district in a given year. State level data that report incidence counts aggregate this information for all districts in the state. It is also common to calculate a rate which is the number of students who left during that year expressed as a proportion of the students who were enrolled that year. In some incidence counts, data are only collected for students in grades 9-12 or 7-12, while others collect it for K-12.

The second basic method takes the annual leaving data

for a certain group of students over several years. For example, an entering group of seventh graders or ninth graders or fifth graders is followed until graduation. As the class progresses through each grade, the number of dropouts from that class in that grade is recorded. The total number of students who left that group before graduation is then used to express a dropout rate. The rate reflects the proportion of students who enter the group, but did not make it to graduation with their peers. This "cohort survival" method illustrates what the cummulative effect of individual grade level decisions is on a whole group of students. Another cohort survival method looks at graduates rather than dropouts.

There is not a correct method. It is important to recognize, however, what the data express. Furthermore, because different methods are used, it makes it difficult to have precise national data, or to make useful comparisons among many states or individual districts unless they use comparable data and methods of collecting that data.

The accuracy of the data is also affected by the fact that not every student who stops attending is withdrawn. In fact, because of the legal requirements for participation and school district responsibilities for enforcing the law, a truant student is by definition out of school for an illegal reason. School districts cannot simply withdraw them. Thus, while many truants are children who have dropped out, they cannot be withdrawn for this reason, and it is unclear how those students should be counted. The result is that some children who have quit attending are not counted as dropouts.

Another source of complication is that not every student who quits school leaves forever. The dropout data that counts students who leave school in a given period describes how many students quit school, but does not reveal if the decision is permanent. Several studies have been conducted, particularly by local districts, that track dropouts for some period of time to see what outcomes they experience. One outcome is that they return to school. Studies by school districts in Phoenix, Philadelphia and San Diego, for example, indicate that a sizeable proportion of dropouts return within a short period of time.

Despite the limited amount of data collected on this problem and the limitations of the data that are collected, there are data which help to put the extent of the problem in perspective.

Dropout Data for Ohio

Ohio is one of those states that collects information on students who drop out of school. Each year the Ohio Department of Education collects information from each of the school districts in the state on the number of students who dropped out of school. Districts are asked to report the number of students who left school for any reason other than death, illness, or transferring to another school district. These data are collected by grade level for students dropping out of grades seven through twelve. This incidence information is used to calculate annual dropout rates for each grade and for all students in grades seven through twelve. These data are available for the whole state for several years and for each school district in the state. These data make it possible to report on the current number of children who left school in the state, to observe changes in the frequency of this decision over several years, and to identify what is common or unusual in individual districts.

Ohio dropout data for the 1982-83 school year are reviewed here. Statewide data are reported on Table 1. According to the most recent data, school districts reported that 23,473 students from grades 7 through 12 dropped out of Ohio's schools during that school year or 2.6 percent of the students enrolled in grades 7 through 12 in Ohio public schools.

TABLE 1

Number and Proportion of Students Reported By Grade Level As Dropouts During the 1982-83 School Year By All Ohio Public Schools[1]

Grade	# of Dropouts	Dropouts as % Enrolled
7th	268	.2%
8th	425	.3%
9th	3,110	2.1%
10th	6,908	4.6%
11th	5,880	4.1%
12th	5,588	4.0%
Special	1,077	
Total 7-12	23,473	2.6%

[1]Source: *OCCD-5 Report, 1982-83 School Year,* Ohio Department of Education.

These data also indicate considerable diversity by grade level in the number of students and proportion of students enrolled who are reported as dropouts. The largest number and proportion of students in a single grade level left school in tenth grade, followed by eleventh and twelfth. The smallest number and proportion left grade seven, followed by eight and nine.

The Ohio Department of Education has collected dropout information from Ohio's school districts using this method for several years. This allows for a comparison of rates from year to year, which is helpful for determining dropout trends. The dropout rate data for each grade and grades seven through twelve combined for the eleven years beginning with 1972-73, are reported on Table 2.

This information indicates that the dropout rate for the state has fluctuated some during the last eleven years. It appeared for several years that the historic trend toward increased participation was being permanently reversed. While enrollment in the state decreased each year during this period, the number of dropouts increased for several years. This was reflected in a steady increase in the dropout rates between 1972-73 and 1978-79. Since that time, the rates have decreased as have the actual number of dropouts. This trend was true for most grade categories as well, although the trend toward increased rates in the younger grades was more stubborn. While the trend is again going toward greater participation, it is clear from the data for the last eleven years that this is not guaranteed.

The district level data are also helpful for assessing dropout problems in the state. The district level data indicate that dropout rates vary from district to district. For example, individual district dropout rates for grades seven

TABLE 2

Dropout Rates by Grade Level for All Ohio School Districts:
Annual Incidence of Leaving as Percent of Enrollment By Grade[1]

	Grade Level						Total
Year	7	8	9	10	11	12	7-12
1972-73	.1	.4	2.1	4.7	5.5	4.4	2.8
1973-74	.2	.4	2.3	5.3	5.9	4.7	3.1
1974-75	.2	.4	2.2	4.6	5.9	5.0	2.9
1975-76	.2	.4	2.2	4.7	5.3	4.5	2.9
1976-77	.1	.4	2.2	4.9	5.4	4.8	3.1
1977-78	.2	.4	2.4	5.0	5.5	5.3	3.3
1978-79	.4	.7	2.8	5.9	5.9	5.4	3.7
1979-80	.3	.5	2.6	5.1	5.2	5.0	3.2
1980-81	.3	.5	2.7	5.0	4.7	4.7	3.1
1981-82	.3	.4	2.4	4.9	4.4	4.2	2.8
1982-83	.2	.3	2.1	4.6	4.1	4.0	2.6

[1]Source: *Ohio Public Schools 1981-82 Dropout Rate Analysis;* and *OCCD-5 Report, 1982-83,* Ohio Department of Education.

through twelve combined ranged between 0 and 12.2 percent. Individual grade level rates are also diverse. While individual grade level rates fall in a relatively narrow range for grades seven and eight, the range widens for ninth grade to a high of 12.8 percent, and gets even wider for the upper grades. Individual districts reported tenth grade dropout rates for a single year that fell in the range between 0 and 29.0 percent. Eleventh grade rates ranged between 0 and 19.5 percent; and twelfth grade rates ranged between 0 and 15.7 percent.

It is possible to review what is typical in Ohio and also to identify situations where the dropout rate is high by looking at the distribution of rates among districts in the state. To do this, individual rates were grouped into ten intervals and the number of districts with rates that fell in each interval was counted. Table 3 provides this data for each grade level and for grades seven through twelve combined. This is based on the data the 614 Ohio districts reported for 1982-83. Table 4 reports the 31 districts with the highest drop out rates, and Table 5 reports the districts that were in the worst 30 districts for three different years.

Some observations based on these data are:

1. Most school districts in Ohio have some dropouts, but their dropout rates are well below the state average. For example, while the average for grades seven through twelve combined was 2.6 percent, half the districts in the state had rates below 1.4 percent. At least half the districts had rates well below the state average for each grade category as well. These data suggest that most school districts have very small numbers of dropouts and that this is not a serious problem in most communities. On the other hand, there are some districts that have serious problems.
2. The distribution data also are helpful for identifying rates that are unusual for total dropouts or individual grade levels, and the districts where rates indicate dropping out is a severe problem compared to what is typical in most districts. The districts with the worst rates for total dropouts had rates between 3.2 and 12.2 percent; the 60 worst twelfth grade rates were between 5.9 and 15.7 percent; the districts with the highest eleventh grade rates had rates between 6.0 and 19.5 percent; the 60 highest tenth grade rates were between 4.9 and 29.0 percent. A high ninth grade rate starts at about 3.8 percent; and a high eighth grade rate is anything in excess of .5 percent. Any seventh grade dropout is a problem.
3. While most districts with high total rates also have high grade level rates in at least one category, not every district with high grade level rates has a total problem. Thus total rates are not always the best way to identify problem situations.
4. If a district has a high total dropout rate, it is likely to have had this problem for several years. According to Table 5, there were 14 districts that ranked among the worst 30 in three different years. While the data fluctuate some from year to year, those with high rates tend to have this problem over several years. It is usually not a fluke occurrence. These data are, therefore, helpful for identifying those locations where this is a special problem.

The data collected by the state give an annual incidence count of students who left school during that year. These data can be used to construct a cohort survival dropout rate. For this analysis, a cohort survival statistic was developed for the 13 districts that had repeatedly high annual dropout rates. Students entering seventh grade in 1977-78 were followed to graduation by adding together the number of dropouts from each grade as that class moved through school. The total was then expressed as a percent of those enrolled in seventh grade in 1977-78. While the accuracy of this method is limited by migration trends, this is the best estimate available of the impact of annual dropout statistics on a whole group of children. The cummulative effect is that between 20 and 51 percent of the seventh grade class of 1977-78 dropped out before graduation in 1982-83 in these districts with chronically high annual dropout rates.

TABLE 3

Distribution of District Level Dropout Rates for Ohio's 614 School Districts—1982-83 School Year by Grade Level and for Grades 7-12 Combined[1]

Rate Intervals	Total[2]	Grade 12	11	10	9	8	7
8.0% +	1	22	28	13	9	1	0
7.0 -7.9%	2	20	9	10	4	0	0
6.0 -6.9%	2	16	25	15	6	0	0
5.0 -5.9%	6	46	40	20	7	0	0
4.0 -4.9%	20	58	58	53	26	1	0
3.0 -3.9%	41	90	78	50	49	7	0
2.0 -2.9%	98	96	102	100	72	5	3
1.0 -1.9%	246	133	130	134	94	11	10
.1 - .9%	168	39	49	72	100	45	22
0	30	94	95	147	247	544	579
Total # Districts	614	614	614	614	614	614	614
State Average	2.6%	4.0%	4.1%	4.6%	2.1%	.3%	.2%
Median	1.4%	2.5%	2.2%	.16%	1.5%	0%	0%

[1]Source: *OCCD-5 Report, 1982-83 School Year,* Ohio Department of Education.

[2]Total refers to all dropouts from grades seven through twelve.

TABLE 4

31 Ohio Districts with the Highest Dropout Rates in the 1982-83 School Year in Order by Rate[1]

District	Rate for Grades 7-12	District	Rate for Grades 7-12
Cleveland City	12.2%	East Cleveland City	4.5%
Cincinnati City	7.5%	Lakewood City	4.4%
Dayton City	7.0%	Toledo City	4.4%
Greenfield Ex. Village	6.6%	Ripley-Union-Lewis Local	4.4%
St. Bernard-Elmwood Place City	6.0%	Garfield Heights City	4.3%
Findlay City	5.6%	Zanesville City	4.3%
Northridge (Montgomery Co.) Local	5.6%	Marion City	4.3%
North Baltimore Local	5.2%	Hamilton Local	4.3%
College Corner Local	5.2%	Steubenville City	4.3%
Southwest Licking Local	5.1%	Bellefontaine City	4.2%
Springfield City	5.1%	Fayetteville-Perry Local	4.2%
Indian Lake Local	4.9%	Scioto Valley (Ross Co.) Local	4.1%
Canton City	4.8%	Galion City	4.0%
Barberton City	4.7%	Columbus City	4.0%
Teays Valley Local	4.6%	South-Western City	4.0%
Mount Healthy City	4.6%		

[1]Source: *OCCD-5 Report, 1982-83 School Year, Ohio Department of Education.*

Why Young People Drop Out of School

Because dropping out of school is widely viewed as a problem and occurs with some frequency in more than a few school districts, there is considerable interest in finding solutions. The search for solutions often starts with learning more about who leaves school and why they make this costly decision.

The search for answers to these questions has typically focused on the person who drops out. Researchers collect information about the reasons that students leave, either by examining data that school districts keep about the students they count as dropouts (Kaeser and Hooper, 1983; *Secondary School Dropouts,* 1981; and Nachman, 1964), or by collecting information from dropouts about why they made this decision (Olsen et al., 1982; *Special Report: The Dropout Problem,* 1980; *Report of Governor's Study Committee,* 1981). In addition, researchers search for characteristics that are common to students who drop out.

School districts must account for students who withdraw. They usually record withdrawals by certain legally defined categories. While these data are informative about the legal explanations for dropping out they do not reveal what caused the students to take this avenue rather than remain enrolled in school.

Other school-based data reveal what educators think are the primary reasons that explain the decisions of students who left. One survey found that educators frequently cited personal and family problems, lack of interest in school, adjustment and personality problems, and educational problems (*Secondary School Dropouts,* 1981).

TABLE 5

Ohio Districts Among the 30 Highest Dropout Rate Districts in 1982-83 And in Two Recent Years

District	7-12 Grade Rate in 1982-83	7-12 Grade Rate in 1981-82	7-12 Grade Rate in 1979-80
Cleveland City	12.2%	12.1%	9.7%
Cincinnati City	7.5%	6.4%	6.3%
Dayton City	7.0%	7.8%	8.3%
St. Bernard-Elmwood Place City	6.0%	5.9%	7.1%
Findlay City	5.6%	5.9%	4.0%
Springfield City	5.1%	5.0%	4.0%
Canton City	4.8%	5.4%	6.6%
Barberton City	4.7%	5.2%	5.3%
East Cleveland City	4.5%	4.7%	5.2%
Marion City	4.3%	4.5%	4.3%
Steubenville City	4.3%	4.6%	4.2%
Columbus City	4.0%	9.3%	8.9%
South-Western City	4.0%	4.9%	6.0%

When dropouts are asked why they quit school, they provide a wide range of explanations which may or may not be reflected in the data on reasons the school district used to explain their withdrawal, or the explanations educators have (*Secondary School Dropouts*, 1981). They cite personal issues such as parenthood, economic necessity, involvement with the law, running away or overwhelming personal problems that made school a low priority (Olsen et al., 1982; *Student Follow-Up Survey*, 1981; *Secondary School Dropouts*, 1981).

For a large share of dropouts, school problems and a dislike of school are cited. As one literature review observed,

> *Literature indicates that in the past, students dropped out due to economic and survival needs. Other more recent research suggests a personal dislike of school. (Novak and Dougherty, 1979)*

Dropouts identify a wide range of complaints related to their school experience. They cite their own failure to achieve, school practices such as expulsion and suspension that make them feel rejected, the low quality of instruction, the sense that teachers don't care about them or their education, the irrelevance of the curriculum, conformity pressures and a sense of not fitting, an impersonal bureaucracy, irrational rules, and treatment that fails to give young people the chance to be responsible. They often indicate feeling isolated and unfairly treated in school (Olsen et al., 1982; Rumberger, 1981; *Children Out of School*, 1974). Two reports noted that while all types of students recognize problems with their school and offer similar criticisms of the school, dropouts do not recognize any positive experiences while their peers do (Olsen et al., 1982), or perceive certain factors in a more extreme way than their peers (Felice, 1981).

The research that tries to identify the characteristics of those who leave school usually focuses on the student's performance and experience, as well as family background and a number of other personal and external issues. This line of inquiry looks for characteristics that are common to the dropout, or are more likely in the dropout than in the peer who graduates.

The child's experience at school prior to leaving such as school performance, attendance, and relationships with other students and teachers receive attention (Rumberger, 1981; *Secondary School Dropouts*, 1981; *Report of Governor's Study Committee*, 1981; Nachman, 1964). It is common for dropouts to have had below grade level reading and math skills, regardless of ability; high absenteeism; high incidences of discipline problems; failing grades, been retained in grade at least once and be older than classmates; rarely participated in school activities; and lacked positive relationships with other students or teachers.

Family background and personal characteristics also receive considerable attention (Steinberg et al., 1984; Rumberger, 1981; *Secondary School Dropouts*, 1981; Novak and Dougherty, 1979; Bachman, et al., 1972; Nachman, 1964; Lichter et al., 1962). Low educational attainment of parents, siblings who drop out, large families, family disruptions such as frequent moves, death in the family or divorce are noted as problems that are common among a large share of dropouts. Economic status of the family is widely examined, as is ethnicity. Racial and language minority youth tend to have a higher dropout rate than their white English speaking peers, but the differences are explained by a variety of factors (Steinberg et al., 1984; *Secondary School Dropouts*, 1981).

Dropouts when compared to their peers are more likely to be victims of some type of abuse, and experience early marriage or parenthood. In addition, they have intertwined problems of lower than average self-esteem, aspiration levels, and feelings of personal worth. Low levels of emotional maturity is also noted (Nachman, 1964). One study of academically able dropouts noted significant personality disorders and adjustment problems (Lichter, et al., 1962) for some dropouts.

This varied research that identifies the characteristics of those who leave school is of limited value. First, a basic conclusion is that there is not a profile of the dropout (*Secondary School Dropouts*, 1981; Nachman, 1964; Miller, 1964). There are as many reasons for leaving as children who leave. Furthermore, this approach does not explain the decision to stay or leave.

It is helpful to the search for solutions because it helps identify some of the children who are "at risk" or have a "propensity" to leave. This is useful for identifying children who may need special assistance, problems which schools may seek to be able to address, and sources of conflict which must be addressed in designing responsive schools.

Most of the research that seeks explanations for why children leave school focuses on the dropout. There is recognition, however, that this individual decision is affected by a number of factors, including the school and school practices (Steinberg et al., 1984; Rumberger, 1981; Felice, 1981; *Children Out of School*, 1974).

Several sources explain some of the ways that school enters into this process (Felice, 1981; Gottfredson, 1981; Novak and Dougherty, 1979; Neill, 1974; *Children Out of School*, 1974). They indicate that educators, and the school's curriculum, environment, and structure can con-

tribute to students leaving school by things they fail to do, as well as in some very active ways.

First, the teacher's role or the school's role may be defined in limited ways which may discourage some students. Teachers who relate to students only in terms of subject matter, and schools that fail to meet student needs and only focus on academic issues contribute to school failure or alientation for some students.

School or individual instructors can also discourage participation by having a narrow definition of what is important to learn, how to teach, and what is student success. Thus, only certain students experience success. As one research explained,

> *If the schools provide few opportunities for many students to experience academic success or be rewarded for their educational experiences—if they are "rigged" against poor students because they reward only the top students—then many students have little reason to be attached to the school or to be committed to educational goals. (Gottfredson, 1981)*

Schools that are narrow and middle-class in their view of success, pedagogy or learning styles, may create problems for students who don't fit this mold.

Schools can act in some more active ways as well. School discipline practices, for example, that exclude students are often cited as significant sources of academic failure and alienation which discourage participation. Similarly, school policies that are discriminatory discourage students. The basic learning environment created by instructors and administrators can be supportive or a source of alienation.

One of the few research projects that have focused specifically on the schools that students leave, rather than on the dropout, develops more completely the school's role in helping or discouraging the potential dropout. The research conducted by Wehlage, Stone and Kliebard compared schools serving similar populations of children but having high and low dropout rates. The research was designed to identify explanations for the differences in rates among the schools. The 1980 report based on the research concludes that school practices have a significant effect.

> *Schools must begin to recognize and accept the fact that students come to school with cultural characteristics, some of which turn out to be dysfunctional with respect to conventional school practices and expectations . . . We conclude that there are certain school climate variables and educator characteristics which respond effectively to the dropout and the potential dropouts, in spite of the personal characteristics that these youth bring with them to the school setting. (Wehlage, Stone and Kliebard, 1980)*

The school issues reflect the level of commitment to serving the marginal student, and the way educators resolve a number of "dilemmas" about how to reward students, provide discipline, provide a meaningful education, respond to styles of learning, and view their roles with regard to the individual student.

The researchers observed that schools which are effective with marginal students make it their policy to be effective. It is a conscious decision. They act on this by reducing the sources of conflict that make students unwilling or unable to succeed, feel unaccepted, and that inhibit forming social bonds. These schools try to accommodate differences and do so in part by negotiating with students. Instructors take on extended roles with relationship to their students and take responsibility for finding ways to accommodate diverse styles of learning and views of what is valuable. The school provides a variety of opportunities and standards for judging success, and a balanced system of authority. These efforts, when combined, affect the student's perception of the opportunity structure for both academic and social success, and in so doing make school participation tolerable to a wider range of students.

The research literature suggests that the decision to leave school is complex. While there are limited theoretical models to explain how the factors all interact, it is clear that personal, social, family, peer and educational factors do interact to affect this decision.

Schooling is an academic and social experience. It requires motivation to spend the time in school and conform with the expectations for performance and behavior that are required. It also involves social interaction.

The motivation to participate can be affected by many factors. Motivation is generally affected by personal goals, confidence and drive, the nature of the experience itself, short-term and long-term payoffs including opportunities for success in school and out, expectations for performance held by people in the child's life particularly family, educators and friends, and the presence of negative sanctions for failure to participate. Each variable is affected by a number of forces.

The social interaction dimension of school participation is also significant. An individual's social needs and successes affect motivation and the ability to go to school. Social experiences at school can be key in judging the experience. The type of social environment is critical, particularly for those who have limited social skills or are vulnerable to any source of rejection, place special value on the social dimension, or are going through the normal stages of development that make social issues central.

Somewhere in this complex of issues, different pressures interact to determine if the student continues to participate. The decision to leave school can result because the negatives of staying out-weigh the positives; or because all positive reasons for staying or all negative sanctions for leaving are absent (Olsen et al., 1981).

Solutions to the Dropout Problem

Despite the complex set of social, personal, familial, and educational factors that affect school participation, it is possible to intervene. Many efforts have been made; many work (Hamer, 1982; Olsen et al., 1982; *Positive Approaches*, 1973). Efforts to intervene are either preventative or work with the person who has left school.

The most common focus for effective intervention is the school. Whether the problem is defined as a symptom of school-based problems or personal limitations, most remedies revolve around the school and making it more able to serve the dropout-prone child or the young person who has already left school and is seeking further education. This discussion will focus on those dropout strategies that relate to schools.

School practices can reduce the incidence of school leaving by minimizing any negative role the school plays in the complex of factors that contribute to leaving. They can also provide a positive experience which can counter some of the other non-school problems that may affect school participation decisions.

The actions needed to intervene in the potential dropout's decision-making process, summarized in the recommendations of one dropout study, are representative of what is typically recommended:

> *Identifying these youth, changing academic programs and the school environment to better meet their needs, supporting youth whose problems outside school interfere with their school involvement, and helping youth become responsible decision-makers—these are things that reverse the dropout process. (Olsen et al., 1982)*

For those who approach the problem as a symptom of school-based problems, prevention depends on schools being equipped, held accountable for, and anxious to serve all children (Felice, 1981; Arnove and Strout, 1980; *Children Out of School*, 1974). Some basic ingredients for this are school environments that are conducive to learning; personnel who are well trained, effective, supportive, and able to relate to diverse needs; and a school that works to involve the community and gain its support. Other key elements are high expectations for all children, and a desire and capacity to serve a wide range of learning styles and skills.

The literature suggests that there are certain children who are "marginal students" within the typical school setting. These are students who do not fit readily into the standard school setting and function less successfully than most students. Wehlage, Stone and Kliebard (1980) observed in their study of schools with high and low dropout rates that a variety of factors within the control of school personnel affect the success rate for marginal students. They observed that schools with low dropout rates differed from those with high rates in many ways. Those more able to serve the marginal students measured their effectiveness in terms of their ability to serve all children. They acted on this commitment by creating many opportunities for success, acknowledging the legitimacy of different styles and values, being flexible with individual students, using their authority carefully, and employing staff who defined their roles and responsibilities for working with students in a broad way. These efforts to better accommodate the "marginal" student payed off.

The most typical approach to prevention focuses on the student as the problem, but describes a variety of school efforts that work with problem students. One of the most commonly advocated approaches to dropout prevention is to identify, early in their school careers, those students who exhibit the characteristics of the dropout-prone-youth and try to work with those children early in their careers. The main focus is children with attendance or achievement problems (*Report of Governor's Study Committee*, 1981; Quay and Allen, 1972; Nachman, 1963). The idea is to reduce motivational problems that are caused by early school failure.

Despite the long held belief that early identification and remediation of academic skills is key to dropout prevention, most dropout prevention programs are designed for students in secondary school. A whole host of activities that are designed to help solve problems from misbehavior to truancy to academic failure fall within the realm of dropout prevention.

Many school systems offer "alternative programs" which provide education in a different context and style than the comprehensive high school. They are often at an alternative site or in a separate place within a regular school. These alternative programs are the most commonly identified dropout prevention efforts. They are often attended by the student who has the characteristics of the dropout but has not left, or by students who have returned to school.

These special programs are a way to accommodate different learning styles and different social needs. They are designed to reduce alienation that is a common complaint about the often bureaucratic secondary school, and to increase skills and employability. Alternative programs tend to share a number of characteristics. They provide for employment or community service in efforts to be more relevant and provide students with concrete forms of success. Instruction tends to be individualized, and progress not rank is rewarded. Class size is small. Efforts are made to develop close social bonds among students and between students and staff through cooperative academic projects, special activities, and group counseling. Special care is given to teacher selection to find those who are caring and willing to take an "extended role" with their students. These programs often have a variety of supportive services including professional and peer counseling, career guidance, and tutoring. Efforts are made to help students improve self confidence and self esteem. Student involvement in decision-making is common, as are efforts to give parents a positive chance to participate, particularly in helping their children with learning. Discipline is important. Student in-put is common in the development of clear policies. Fair and firm enforcement is stressed (Hamer, 1982; Olsen et al., 1982; Gottfredson, 1981; Arnove and Strout, 1980; *Secondary School Dropouts*, 1980; Novak and Dougherty, 1979; Hinkley, 1979; Neill, 1975; *Positive Approaches*, 1973).

Many students who leave school return after some period of absence. Some return to the regular high school that they left, often to the regular program. Others return to special programs for the dropout-prone youth. Others return to alternative programs for the adult learner or the returned dropout. Some seek an equivalency degree, while others enroll in programs designed for a regular high school degree. The alternative programs are diverse. They are often located on a separate site, and have different hours than the regular high school. Flexible scheduling, academic remediation, and responsive and supportive staff are common elements of these programs.

There are also a variety of youth employment and training projects designed for the dropout, but not necessarily offered by a public school. Some other agency helps the student develop basic skills, survival skills, and employability skills. Many programs include job development and placement services. Many programs focus on preparation for success in the community as their goal, not completion of secondary school (*Secondary School Dropouts*, 1981).

The Citizens' Council's Position on Dropout Problems and Their Solutions

Public schools cannot serve children who have stopped participating. Unfortunately, it often takes this crisis—an individual or a large number of students dropping out—to generate concern about success for all students. This concern is often too little too late. As one young person put it,

> *It's so hypocritical to make a big deal out of me dropping out of school. There is a big hullaballoo when I drop out, but no one cares what it's like for me when I'm at school. (Olsen et al., 1982)*

Most people who make this decision do so reluctantly. It comes after a long history of disaffection and dissatisfaction with school. This is often the final expression of a prolonged mismatch between student needs and educational experiences.

The Council believes that this tragedy can be avoided and must be avoided in more cases. School practices can have a positive effect on children and must be designed to include more children. This will not guarantee complete success, but can remove school-based obstacles. Furthermore, schools need to be a positive force in the lives of many for whom it is only another problem.

The Council's positions with regard to many of the dropout issues and solutions to this problem are presented here:

1. It is desirable for all children to complete a secondary education of high quality that helps students make the transition to adult roles. This is an important social and education goal, and a desirable experience for most young people.
2. At any point in time, there are young people who lack a high school diploma, are eligible to be served by the public schools (of compulsory school age or under 22 in Ohio), but are not enrolled in any educational program that will lead to a diploma. Regardless of what they are doing, or what explanation they have for not being in school, they are not working toward the diploma which compulsory attendance laws, cultural and social expectations have indicated are essential for assuming adult roles. These students are dropouts.
3. Because of the importance that has been assigned to completion of a secondary education dropping out is a problem. The individual and community suffer when children do not obtain the level of education that is assumed to be critical for literate and effective citizens, and for access to more education or employment. When individuals fail to achieve this level of education, it is also a school problem. The schools have not met our expectations for what they are to accomplish. Furthermore, when large proportions of youth in any individual school or school district fail to complete high school, or certain groups are less likely to succeed, the educational effort appears to have missed the mark.
4. The negative consequences for the individual who fails to complete high school are real for most students and devastating for many. To reduce the social and human costs of the dropout problem it is essential to reduce the negative effects of school leaving, retain more young people in school and provide them with a useful experience, and provide people with more options to complete their schooling if they are not able to pursue it in the time sequence that we have defined as the way to obtain a diploma.
5. While schools and society are both hard to change, schools can be responsive. Educational change has many immediate possibilities for reducing the number of students who drop out.
6. Schools make a difference to the decision to leave school. They can be part of the problem or part of the solution. Existing schools have demonstrated that dropout-prone-youth succeed and fewer children become dropout-prone when the structure and educational program and process respond to variations in learning style, values and cultural norms; are orderly and dedicated to all children; are caring institutions with educators who are involved in the development of young people; where the community and children are respected and engaged with school personnel; and where special needs receive attention. Much of this is accomplished within the regular school program. In some cases special programs exist. One solution is to make more schools the kind of places that contribute to student success within the regular school structure, and to institutionalize alternative programs.
7. If the school program is to be part of the solution to the dropout problem, interest in assuring success must exist long before individual students reach the crisis point of the decision to leave school. Success for all children depends on interest in their success from the start of schooling. Since many dropouts are students who experience early school failure, have difficult home lives, or exhibit annoying classroom behavior, it is easy for educators to feel frustrated or powerless and to be unresponsive to their needs. If schools are to be a positive force in dropout prevention, they must resist the temptation to give less to these children who need more. If schools are to be a resource and not a barrier to the dropout-prone youth, they must accept this as their responsibility and make the adjustment in the delivery of service so that they meet the student rather than aggravate the problems that seem to create school failure.
8. The young people who experience the greatest costs for leaving school—racial and language minority, and

poor children—also tend to be the students whom schools have the most difficulty serving and who therefore have the highest dropout rates. The most "at risk" without a diploma are also the most "at risk" not to receive one. This means that more emphasis must be put on removing both school and employment barriers for these young people.

9. Many dropouts are really stop-outs. Large proportions of premature school leavers return to school or seek some education after leaving school. This underlying desire for education suggests a whole series of school practices that will encouarge dropouts to return to school: follow-up with all dropouts to remind them that school is still an option and they are welcomed, flexible programming to accommodate youth whose academic program is out of sync with their age mates, flexible scheduling to accommodate the special responsibilities that the returning dropout may have such as parenthood, and a supportive environment and few restrictions placed on participation.
10. The student who leaves school without a diploma directly experiences the consequences of that decision; the schools, which are usually at least partly responsible for that decision, do not. Schools need to be more accountable for serving all children if more children are to be served. Their failure to serve all children creates a type of inequality of outcome which is not acceptable.
11. Schools need to be more accountable for serving all children. This happens when communities and the education professionals hold this expectation for their schools. Citizens and educators are both responsible for raising expectations for the way schools perform. Public interest can result in more attention to this problem and goal.
12. Data on the incidence of students leaving school are useful for identifying the magnitude of this problem in any community, and calling attention to the need for solutions. School personnel must be willing to collect this information, be precise about who is being counted, and share that information. This should be part of the assessment of local progress toward educational equity, excellence, and effectiveness.
13. Several types of data are helpful for monitoring the problem and understanding who is affected and why.
    A. The State of Ohio Department of Education should continue to collect from school districts data on the incidence of students leaving by grade level each year. The state should not only collect this data but use it to identify districts with high dropout rates and direct state resources to help solve problems in those districts. It should also analyze the data and provide it to the public and local school district personnel so they have a comparative perspective on their own districts.
    B. The Department should also periodically collect from local districts data on the number of students leaving by reason of their withdrawal, in order to have some insights about the legal reasons that are used to account for students who leave school.
    C. Local school districts and the state should also collect and report cumulative data on dropouts in order to measure the true magnitude of the problem and to monitor any changes.
    D. Another important piece of data is to follow-up on all dropouts within a six to 12 month period to find out what they are doing. Because many return to school, it is a helpful measure of the need for educational services and a much more accurate description of how many students have taken an extended leave from school.
    E. Finally, local school districts need to keep good records on their students, particularly on those who show the common signs that indicate they may be on the road to dropping out. Schools need to use their records on attendance, failures, retention in grade, and discipline problems to identify students who need extra support. Those students should be targeted for help and receive it as early as possible.

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